



# THE SENTINEL

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The Newsletter of the New Scotland Historical Association

Fall 2022

## STORIES FROM THE BENDER MELON FARM

By Debbie Mahan

The date is Monday, September 24, 1917. THE KNICKERBOCKER PRESS in Albany, NY contained the following:

“RED CROSS TO HAVE BIG MELON EAT NEW SCOTLAND UNIT TO HAVE LUSCIOUS FEAST ON BENDER MELON FARM WEDNESDAY”

According to the story found in The Knickerbocker Press, the first and greatest “melon eat” in history would take place at the Charles Bender melon farm in New Scotland for the benefit of the New Scotland chapter of the Red Cross. Weather permitting, the event would take place from 3 to 9 pm at the farm and would be visible from the road by the thousands of red, white, and blue lights strung on the trees, fences, and buildings. Hundreds of visitors were expected from all over the Capital District, and these lucky visitors would enjoy a tour of the farm as well as feasting on the ‘world-renowned’ Bender melons. Tables would be arranged in the shape of the Red Cross heart, covered in Red Cross tablecloths, and all the proceeds from the sale of the melons would go to the Red Cross for hospital supplies being sent to France by the Albany County chapter.

The weather did cooperate, and on Thursday, September 27, 1917, THE KNICKERBOCKER PRESS ran a full two-column story of the event, with photos to add to the reader’s enjoyment. In the photo below, you can imagine the excitement of the day with the uniformed Red Cross volunteers, the tables set with Red Cross coverings, the Bender farmhouse in the background and the many automobiles parked on the grounds.



Red Cross workers serving melons on the Bender Lawn.

The story on Thursday told of 2,000 people “on foot and by automobile” attending the event, where \$600.00 was raised for the Red Cross.

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## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Members and Friends:

Hard to believe that we are in the waning days of summer. We may lament the shortening of daylight, but the good news is that, with the coming of Fall, the New Scotland Historical Association's public programs will begin again. The tentative program schedule is listed on page six. The first program, on Tuesday, Oct, 4, 2022, is "From Dutch Jenever and Colonial Rum to Empire Rye: The Story of Distilling in New York State," and ties in nicely with local interest in the rebirth of distilling in the Town of New Scotland. As always, programs are presented free of charge, and any monetary cost to support a program is underwritten by annual dues paid by NSHA members.

NSHA has been able to present seven public programs every year due to the efforts of **Alan Kowlowitz**, NSHA Program Chairperson. Other NSHA Board members are there to help, but he is really the one who makes programs happen. His background as a NYS archivist has provided him with many personal contacts in the area of local history. Alan engages the speakers, makes sure the topics are of local or regional interest, sets up the program space, and is always on hand to make sure the program runs smoothly and any technical needs of the speaker are met. He produces the advertising posters, and makes sure NSHA's publicity person gets the information needed for press coverage. We all owe Alan a big thank you for all of his efforts!

Just a reminder that the museum is opened a half hour before any scheduled program, and every Sunday (except holiday weekends) now through December 18, 2022. With the beginning of the 2022-23 programs schedule, NSHA Officers, Trustees and Committee Chairs look forward to seeing our members and friends again. Thank you so much for your support.

Sarita Winchell, President

## Bicentennial Quilt Update:

Thank you, Kathleen (Olsen) Weintraub who contacted me after the Summer Sentinel arrived at her house. The article identified her as "Kathy" Olsen which needed to be corrected. More importantly she shared her excitement that the quilt article appeared in this issue. She made the Helderberg Castle square, her first quilting experience, when she was 12. She attended RIT and majored in Fine Art. Now, she is a professional quilter! In her words: "I was SO JAZZED about the article on the quilt." Judy Kimes should be commended for researching the Bicentennial Quilt and making Kathleen's day! Being able to touch people's heart and memories is so rewarding.

Sherry Burgoon, Editor

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During the evening, Peter Ten Eyck introduced Dr. John H. Finley of the Albany County Red Cross, who spoke of the great need for assistance to France and said, "the socks and bandages for soldiers and all sorts of comforts for the little ones are wrapped in every one of those melons which you have bought, and they are being sent to France as fast as they can be to make the conditions over there better than they were before."

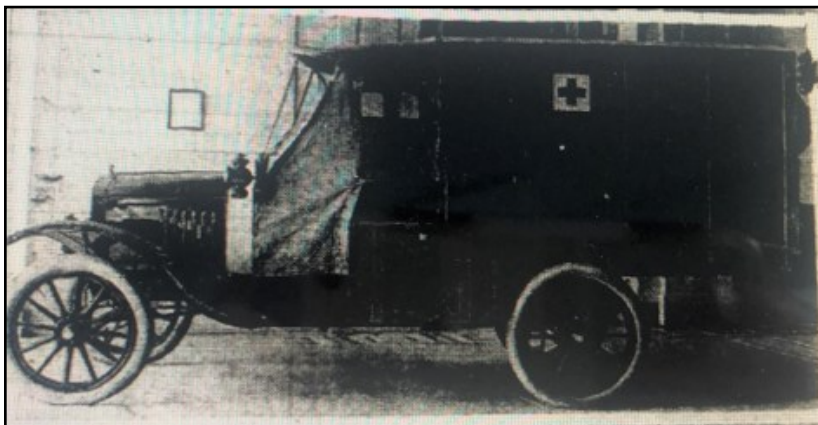
Mr. Charles Bender received loud cheers from everyone present when he announced that Bender melons would be sent to President Woodrow Wilson who also served as the president of the American Red Cross Society.

Mrs. Wayne thanked everyone who helped make the evening so successful, and named the following Red Cross volunteers:

Alice Forester, Ruth Nicholson, Kathryn Martin, Jessie Ackerman, Martha Ackerman, Emma Haltman, Kathryn Blessing, Helen Cook, Kathryn Hilton, Iantha Blessing, Margaret Cook, Anna Cook, Julia Furbeck, Edith Wiltsie, Alida Mae Pier, Carrie Back, Lois Wands, Mrs. Wiltsie, Mrs. Irving Winne, Mrs. A. S. Raynsford, Mrs. S. Beck, Mrs. J. Taylor, and Agnes C. Sieber.



Charles Bender showing off some melons from the farm.



A photo of the ambulance bought by the New Scotland Red Cross chapter that was sent to France.

On Sunday, May 12, 1918, THE KNICKERBOCKER PRESS reported that: "A fully equipped ambulance, supplied in accordance with specification of the government, has been bought by the New Scotland Red Cross chapter and sent to France. Thousands of residents of Albany and vicinity who attended the "melon eat" at the Bender farm last year contributed largely to the payment of this ambulance."

On October 2, 1920, a reader's question in THE ARGUS in Albany, NY is: "WHAT IS A BENDER MELON?"

The answer is: "A Bender melon is one grown on the Bender farm near Voorheesville, or from the seed secured from the Bender Farm."

A story from THE KNICKERBOCKER NEWS on September 5, 1923, reported that "continued drought has reduced the melon crop on the Charles Bender melon farm in New Scotland to forty percent of the usual production, and cold nights have made the crop ten days late." However, Charles Bender said that the quality of the melons in 1923 was superior to past years, and the melons vary in size from three to ten pounds each! The farm was also experiencing a labor shortage that year. Mr. Bender said that the melons needed three factors to develop into the prized fruit that could only be purchased directly from the farm: the right seed, a gravelly soil and constant care and attention.

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On Wednesday, September 22, 1926, THE TIMES UNION of Albany, NY reported the following:

**“MAYOR PICKS BENDER MELONS FOR AIR CARGO”**

The story reported that Mayor Thacher had arranged to send a basket of Bender melons to Buffalo, NY by way of a commercial airplane that was stopping first in Albany from New York City. The melons were to be a gift from Albany for the celebration at Buffalo’s airport and were selected by the mayor because they were typically an Albany product with no competitive product, and shipment by plane would demonstrate that perishable products could be transported by air.

Charles Bender was born on the family farm in the Town of New Scotland in 1861. He inherited the farm from his father, George W. Bender in 1886. Charles started to work with two standard cantaloupe melon varieties, and with cross-fertilization help from the bees, was able to produce his famous “Golden Queen” melon by 1905.

The sale of the melons to the well-known restaurants in New York City began after Charles brought two crates of melons to the city one night and gave samples to hotel and restaurant owners. The rest is history.

In 1942, Charles Bender sold the farm to William M. Taylor and his wife, owners of the Glendale Farm dairy, for \$5000.00. The Taylors moved to the farm and continued to grow melons, while Charles lived in his home on the property until his death on December 18, 1945. Mr. Bender was 84 when he died, having been ill for two weeks prior.

Additional resources for information about the bender melon farm can be found at: [Newscotlandhistoricalassociation.org](http://Newscotlandhistoricalassociation.org)

Select “Resources”, Then select “BENDER MELON FARM”

Sullivan, Dennis: Charles Bender and the Bender Melon Farm, A Local History

### **THE BENDER MELON PRESERVE TODAY**

In December 2021, the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy paid \$1 million for the 176-acre former Bender Melon Farm, near the corner of routes 85 and 85A in New Scotland.

To help pay for the purchase, the conservancy sold 20 of those acres along Route 85 for about half-a-million dollars to Ron Kay, is currently building a small development, along Route 85A.

I recently spoke to Mark King, Executive Director of the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy. Mark is a life-long resident of the Capital District and shared his enthusiasm with me about plans for the newly acquired acres; the wetlands and fields surrounding them provide habitat for many wildlife species, so habitat restoration and trail development are among the top priorities for the land as MHLC works to create an open space for everyone to enjoy. David’s Trail, the first nature trail at Bender Melon Farm Preserve, was dedicated in 2021 by the Iselin Family of Delmar in memory of their son.

The MHLC staff are also hoping to repair the old bridge that passes over the Rail Trail, eventually connecting the north and south portions of the preserve for hiking and biking trails.

Please visit [mohawkhudson.org](http://mohawkhudson.org) to read more about the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy OR

If you would like to donate to MHLC please mail donations to:

Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy, 425 Kenwood Ave, Delmar, NY 12054



## REFLECTIONS OF A NEW SCOTLAND MILKMAN

by Sam Youmans

*Editors' note: Sam Youmans was born on the family farm in the Town of New Scotland on July 8, 1921. The farm is situated on Youmans Road about a half mile north of Route 85. The following piece, which describes some of the experiences of the New Scotland milkman in the late 30s and early 40s, was written in 1990 during a class at the Voorheesville Public Library on writing personal history.*

One of my first jobs after getting my driver's license was peddling milk. In fact, my road test was taken on the rough stone streets of downtown Albany. The rattling milk bottles in the '37 Ford station wagon made it difficult to hear the instructor, but I passed anyway.

Then, as now, it was every boy's goal, when reaching age 16, to get a driver's license. This seemed to be the ultimate symbol of manhood and provided all kinds of opportunities to go places and have fun. I discovered, however, that there was to be some expense to driving as Dad charged 5 cents a mile to use the family car for pleasure.

Being a person who liked to sleep late in the morning, I found the early hours of a milkman hard to get used to, especially when I had been out late the night before. I had to rise at 2 a.m., load the pick-up truck and start deliveries by 3 a.m.

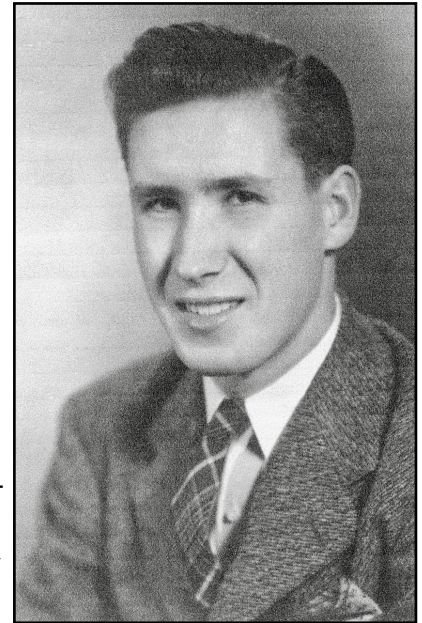
In summer, the cases of bottles had to be iced and covered with a canvas tarp. A good flashlight had to be carried to read notes from customers. A note usually meant running back to the truck for something extra and was most displeasing after climbing two flights of stairs in an apartment house.

Except for an occasional late bar patron, there was little traffic this early in the morning. Delivery could be made faster by parking on the wrong side of the street and running red lights when no police were in sight. The only other people about the city then were other milkmen and the Freihofer men with their horses and wagons.

Most of the city route was finished before rush-hour traffic; the suburbs were covered on the way out. After the route was finished by late morning, the truck served double duty to run errands in the afternoon. On a few occasions just the license plate was used by placing it on an old farm truck for hauling hay. This worked all right until a suspicious state trooper stopped it to see the registration certificate. That resulted in a hefty \$15. fine. A farm truck registration plate would have cost \$2.

Winter problems often caused delays and extra work. Cold engines that refused to start would require a tow with the tractor or horses. Deep snow meant putting on tire chains and/or driving through the fields if the road was drifted shut. Several times the trucks were left overnight in Kissel's Garage and the loads taken out to the main road by a horse-drawn sleigh.

Milk was kept from freezing by placing kerosene lanterns between the cases and the cases covered with newspapers and horse blankets. Most customers had either a milk box or a milk door built into the side of their houses.



According to Donna Youmans, this photo of Sam Youmans was likely circa 1941 and was probably his Cobleskill yearbook photo.

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## **New Scotland Historical Association's Draft Program Schedule 2022-23**

(Titles are tentative and subject to change)

**Oct. 4, 2022 (7:30pm) From Dutch Jenever and Colonial Rum to Empire Rye:** The Story of Distilling in New York State – Pioneer craft distiller and co-founder of the Albany Distilling Company, John Curtin will discuss the fascinating history of distilling in New York and our region from its colonial beginnings to the recent emergence of farmhouse and craft distilling.

**Nov. 1, 2022 (7:30pm) Suffrage and Its Limits: Why the suffrage centennial still matters** – The Women's Suffrage Centennial (2017 in New York and 2020 nationally) put a brief spotlight on the long struggle for women's right to vote. However, the suffrage victory proved to be a limited step on the road to women's full political and legal equality. Dr. Susan Lewis will review what we have learned from the suffrage centennial, discuss the evolution of the suffrage movement into the League of Women Voters and the (failed) push for an Equal Rights Amendment, and consider the efforts from 1920 to the present to have women and women's issues more completely represented in American politics.

**Dec. 4, 2022 (2:00pm) Songs of Our Empire State** –Renowned local musicians Tom Lindsey, Michael Eck and Paul Jossman, collectively known as the Lost Radio Rounders, will explore the fascinating and diverse history of New York State through historic songs. You'll go whaling with "The Montaukers," fighting Gentleman Johnny Burgoyne at "The Battle of Saratoga," and taking a trip to Buffalo on "The Erie Canal."

**Feb. 5, 2022 (2:00pm) Civil War in the Mohawk Valley: The Battle of Oriskany** - The Revolutionary War in the Mohawk Valley it was largely a civil war between neighbors, siblings, and fathers and sons. Historian Terry McMaster will discuss the Battle of Oriskany, one of the bloodiest battles of the Revolutionary War and the major players that influenced and participated in actions that tore the Mohawk Valley apart including the Herkimers, Johnsons, Brants, Butlers, the Palatine German, Dutch and Scots-Irish settlers, and the Mohawk, Oneida, Seneca and other Native participants.

**March 5, 2022 (2:00pm) Where a Kill is not a Kill and a Fly not a Fly** – Dr. Charles Gehring, Dutch language scholar, Director of New Netherland Research Center, and New Scotland resident, will discuss the origin and meaning of Dutch family and place names prominent in the regions that were part of New Netherland.

**April 4, 2022 (7:30pm) Enterprising Waters: The History and Art of New York's Erie Canal** - Brad Utter, Senior Historian and Curator at the New York State Museum and co-author of **Enterprising Waters: The History and Art of New York's Erie Canal**, will discuss the artifacts, documents, images, and artworks that illustrate the history of the Erie Canal from its inception until today. Focusing on the Capital Region, he will touch on themes of politics, engineering, commerce, and life on the canal illustrated by full color images of artifacts, documents, and images featured in the book and the exhibit on which it was based.

**May 2, 2022 (7:30pm) The Gilded Age Rises Again in Troy, NY** - Kathryn Sheehan, Rensselaer County & Troy City Historian will present an illustrated lecture on how Troy's 19th century architecture became an integral backdrop to the Julian Fellows HBO series, *The Gilded Age*. Kathryn worked with the location scouts and production designer on locations throughout the city as well as providing information on how Troy appeared during the Gilded Age, who the major players were in the city at the time that represented "old" money and "new" money. Kathryn will also share some of the behind-the-scenes stories that happened during the filming for season one.

**All Programs will be held at the Wyman Osterhout Community Center**

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Other than flat tires or an occasional truck breakdown, most days went by without incident. I recall only one bad accident where the driver lost control and slid off the road, spilling the load of milk and eggs down an embankment.

After numerous mechanical repairs, brake and clutch jobs, the average dependable life of a milk truck was only three or four years. Some jokers said it was the Youman trucks that kept Kissel's Garage in business.

En route one early morning, an old lady waved me down very distraught that her invalid brother had fallen out of bed. Feeling sorry for her, I went in and helped her get him off the floor and back in bed .

One time I was invited in for a drink at a late-running New Year's Eve party I politely declined. Another driver had to climb a tree to retrieve a customer's cat. And still another driver found two men lying in the road by Whitbeck's Pond and stopped to see if they were all right. He soon learned they were obviously drunk and had picked this spot to sleep it off. One was Jay Whitbeck and the other a man named Art. Jay offered no resistance but Art, annoyed at being disturbed, staggered to his feet and took a swing at the driver, who returned to the safety of the truck and drove around them.

The most embarrassing moment occurred one warm summer morning about 6 a.m. when I was delivering to some customers in a New Scotland neighborhood. A young lady, whom I had known for a long time, was calling in her dog named Sam. "Here Sam! Here Sam!" I think she was embarrassed when I said, "Wilmot, what will the neighbors think!"

The above article appeared in the February 1993 article of *The Sentinel*. It has been reproduced in Sam's memory.

Sherry Burgoon, Editor

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