

Bedford Farmers Club
Minutes of the Meeting of April 18, 2018
Chappaqua Friends Meeting House
Chappaqua, New York

President **James Wood** called the meeting to order at approximately 3:00 pm and greeted all visitors, who were announced. Once a guest has attended two meetings, he/she is eligible for Club membership.

Elin Peterson, Club Secretary, read the minutes of the October 2017 meeting.

Roger Vincent, newly elected as Club Treasurer in October 2017, next addressed the Club. He stated that, after 166 years of existence, the Club now has an IRS identification number. And he has found a bank that will give the Club free checking. It was noted that a question traditionally asked of the Club's former Treasurer, Nick Markoff, each month was: "Are we solvent?" To which Nick would answer, "Yes." Roger then reminded all present that he is now accepting 2018 Club membership dues, which are very reasonable at \$10/year

Jim Wood noted the absence of Dick Ten Dyke and encouraged all to look at the Bedford Farmers Club website (<http://www.bedfordny.com/BFC/>), which has many beautiful photographs of Club meetings going back many years. He also wished Muriel Ten Dyke a speedy recovery. Jim also noted that his wife Twink had her right knee replaced a week earlier and is now recovering.

Pam Sorkin next presented *Timely Tips*, as she – a former science teacher – as taken over this responsibility from George Pouder.

Pam devoted her comments to a discussion of ash trees. This past winter the rain, wind, and storms knocked down numerous trees, power lines, etc -- including ash trees, which still are dropping their branches in chunks. Pam began to research the topic and discovered that our ash trees are indeed suffering from bacterial and viral infestations. There also is an insect, the emerald ash borer, that will do ash trees in. The borer attacks black, green and white ash trees. White ash is native to our region and is sought after for lumber – cabinetry, flooring – as it is strong and resilient. Green ash likes moist conditions and is prevalent along waterways. It also is commonly planted along streets and in yards, but it does not do well in drought conditions

The emerald ash borer was accidentally introduced to this country via wood crating. It was first discovered in May 2002 in Michigan. Later it was seen in Ontario and then first in New York State near Buffalo. As of 2010 it has been present in the Hudson River Valley and has been found in northern Westchester County.

Pam spoke with Gerald Giordano of the Cornell Cooperative Extension Service. The borer is smaller than a penny and has four life stages. Signs of infestation include: drooping canopy, yellowing/browning of trees, D-shaped indentions in the bark, bark slitting vertically, and S-shaped tunnels. Infested trees die within 2-3 years and cannot be saved.

To prevent the borer from spreading, it is important not to move firewood. If you create/have ash firewood, do not transport it from your property.

A new upset is the spotted lanternfly, which has the potential to do much damage to orchards and to the lumber industry.

Pam shared handouts about each insect with Club members.

Roger Vincent, Chair of the Club's Nominating Committee, then presented the slate of candidates to serve as 2018 Club officers:

President	Mary Farley
President Emeritus	James Wood
Vice President	Robin Ashley
Secretary	Elin Peterson
Treasurer	Roger Vincent
Asst Secy & Treasurer	Fran Osborne
Historian	John Stockbridge
Timely Tips	Pam Sorkin
Director of Communications	Dick Ten Dyke
Signs	Eugene & Sylvia Finger
Hospitality	Julie Henken

Jim Wood then addressed those present, stating that he has been very proud to have served as Club President. Now that he is turning 91, however, he is pleased to propose Mary Farley, the Club's long-standing Vice-President and former Chair of the Program Committee, to now serve as President. Jim further highlighted that Mary has truly captured the culture of the Bedford Farmers Club.

Jim then formally nominated Mary to serve as President. Roger then nominated the full slate of candidates. There were numerous seconds, and the slate of 2018 Club officers was unanimously approved by acclamation.

Jim then turned the meeting over to Mary, stating: "I do have a gavel, which Twink could not find today. I will find it, however, and turn it over to Mary."

Mary Farley then took the helm of the meeting and commented that the Wood legacy of Club leadership might continue if only Jim and Twink would adopt her, noting further that Jim has always been an inspiration to her and that working with everyone over the years has been wonderful.

John Stockbridge, Club Historian, then addressed the Club, taking time to look back upon the Wood family's relationship with the Farmer's Club, which is truly generational. (See addendum to minutes for John's complete comments.)

Karen Simons, principal of Hudson Varick Resources, was next introduced as the meeting's guest speaker, on the topic of **Sustainable Food Sourcing in the Hudson Valley**.

Karen spoke of the Hudson Valley Food Hubs Initiative, for which she did much research. The principal goal of this study is to help to identify ways in which small and mid-size farms can become more sustainable. The full report can be found online at:

<http://localeconomiesproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/food-hubs-initiative-report.pdf>.

For the study, the Hudson River Valley (HRV) is defined as encompassing ten counties, from Albany down to Westchester. However, the data for the report is from nine counties. This region used to be the breadbasket of New York City. Today it's major agricultural products are hay, onions, corn, and apples.

Eighty-three percent of the HRV's food production is in apples, and it has been declining over the past 60 years. The trend now is for young people – and notably women – establishing orchards and utilizing a new technique, which is the spindle tree, which offers higher production and revenues. Spindle apple trees are pruned to be tall and straight, allowing them to be planted closer together and thus offering higher production volume. They are not, however, good for U-Pick aesthetics. Apples are presently a \$60 million business in the HRV.

Apples are difficult to grow organically in the HRV, as there are many pests and high humidity. New York is the nation's second largest apple producer after Washington State. As the nation moved to a national system of food distribution, with refrigerated trucks, etc., Washington apples have become inexpensive relative to New York apples, even given transport costs. We should be buying our apples from New York, but they are more expensive due to economies of scale. Washington farms/orchards are larger. One factor that may help is that school systems are now allowed to state a preference for New York apples and are not forced to take the lowest bids/prices.

Another factor that discourages the New York apple industry is lack of infrastructure. There are not many apple processors and only two in the HRV. These processors take "seconds" – i.e., the non-cosmetic apples -- and turn them into such products as applesauce. Increased seconds income would help to make apple farms more profitable. In some instances you will see applesauce and other products being made on the farms themselves.

HRV vegetable farms are a \$45 million/year business. Half of this production is located in Orange County, a black dirt (or "muck") region of rich, organic soil. The HRV has 13,000 acres under cultivation for vegetables. While there are 30,00 acres under cultivation for corn in HRV, this corn mostly feeds local cattle.

Although new farmers are appearing, there has been an overall decline in number. Furthermore, the average age of HRV farmers is 57. The new farms tend to be smaller, more diversified, and more sustainable. We must train the next generation of farmers. The Glynwood Institute, Stone Barns, and the Hudson Valley Farm Hub are at the forefront of this effort.

The HRV used to be dairy country. However, the conventional dairy farms lack regional/local processing facilities and are "price takers." Hence, they have been unprofitable and forced out of business. Some dairy farms are shifting to organic and grass fed methods and/or becoming processors in making yogurt, etc. By adding value and going direct to retail, these farmers capture more revenues.

Amy's Organics is opening a \$95 million organic milk processing facility in Goshen. It takes three years to transition land to "organic" designation (as defined by the USDA), and you must begin with baby cows on organic lands. Furthermore, organic milk cannot be stored in tanks that have held conventional milk. "Grass-fed" is not synonymous with "organic."

In terms of beef production, there has been a shift towards grass-fed. New York City and people with money are willing to pay the higher prices. Most grass-fed beef goes direct to retail via farmers markets, etc. This allows the farmer to capture the entire supply chain and increase profitability. As with other agricultural products, there are processing gaps for livestock in the HRV.

The HRV does not produce much poultry, although there is some in Sullivan County. Typically chickens are a factor in diversified farming. A farmer can be paid \$25 for a whole chicken if sold directly off the farm. People are also willing to \$6 for a dozen eggs from heritage breeds

In terms of grain production, the HRV used to be the breadbasket of New York City. Of course, grain production has since moved to the western states where there are better economies of scale and the climate permits year-round growth. Within New York State, grains are grown in the Finger Lakes region.

There is increased interest in grain production for alcohol and flours. New York State has been supportive in terms of allowing distillers and breweries to sell on site or at specific locations such as farmers markets. However, New York State grains must be used in their production. The State is promoting hops and barley production, which used to be grown more extensively. We have lost seeds and knowledge, however. Once again, there is the problem of processing in that the HRV only has one malting facility, which only serves its own brand.

Seeds used to be very regional and adapted to their climate. Farmers would save the seeds that grew well on their property, but this practice ended. Seed companies have been bought up by larger companies, and the large companies decided that it was too difficult to have multiple, regional varieties. GMO seeds are designed to work with chemicals – herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers.

New York State is lucky in that the Cornell Cooperative Extension Service – unlike other land grant colleges – focuses efforts on sustainable agriculture. Sustainable, organic, regenerative farming requires fewer inputs overall. Animals provide fertilizers, etc.

Statistics:

- (1) Agricultural production in the HRV totals \$330 million.
- (2) 30% of NYS farmland is in farms over 65 years old.
- (3) Since 1950 we have gone from 14,000 to 4,000 farms in the HRV. Land is sold more for development than for agriculture.
- (4) Since 1950 we have gone from 1.6 million to 400,000 acres in agricultural production in the HRV.
- (5) The HRV has lost 22% of its orchards in the past 60 years.
- (6) The HRV has lost 70% of its dairy farms and 60% of its dairy cows.

Scenic Hudson has identified 765,000 acres of farmland that it would like to see preserved. One positive development is that Stuart's Farm has gone into conservation via the Westchester Land Trust.

Karen's recommendations for how we can help promote local agriculture:

- (1) Buy from local farms, including CSA (Community-Supported Agriculture) contracts and farmers markets. CSAs help with cash flow, as the farmers receive money up front to pay for their seed and other inputs and have a reliable cash flow during the growing season.

- (2) Go to restaurants that use local farm products – e.g., Truck, Purdy's Farmer & the Fish, Crabtree's Kittle House, Bedford 234.
- (3) Encourage your local grocery stores to buy from local farmers.
- (4) If you have business knowledge and experience, become a mentor.
- (5) If you have money or land, you can help with financing or provide acreage.

Westchester County now has the Westchester-Grown Farm Trail. It is a designated route that links a series of farms for 17 miles, between North Salem and Sleepy Hollow. The trail was established by the Friends of Hilltop Hanover Farm and Westchester County. A map can be found on the Bedford 2020 website.

The Westchester Growers Alliance, of which Karen is a board member, is sending out a survey, attempting to identify all of the County's farms, which is very difficult to do – especially when farmers are utilizing the land of others.

Soil is a carbon sink. Most of the soil's carbon is stored in its organic layer, of which organic farms have more. Thus, if we were to shift to organic and sustainable agricultural methods, we could better address climate change.

The Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018 (H.R.2), which has just been voted out of the House Agricultural Committee, takes money away from important programs for small farmers. We all should contact our local Congressional representatives regarding this legislation. Sean Patrick Maloney is on the House Agricultural Committee, and Kirsten Gillibrand is on the Senate Agricultural Committee.

Mary Farley announced that our next meeting will be on May 9th and will be a field trip to Blue Stone Farm in Brewster, a 23-acre farm run by Episcopal nuns on the campus of the old Melrose School.

Minutes respectfully submitted by **Elin Peterson**.

Addendum: Complete Comments of Club Historian John Stockbridge at the April 2018 Bedford Farmers Club Meeting

In keeping with what we just learned about Jim's (and I'm sure Twink's) decision to pass the baton of leadership, I thought that it would be appropriate to look back upon the Wood family's relationship with the Farmer's Club, which is truly generational.

The first minutes for the Club that we have are from 1867, fifteen years after the founding of the Club. As reported in the Statesman (a Westchester newspaper of the time), Mr. Arnell Dickinson, an original founder of the Farmer's Club, had passed away and at the December, 1867 meeting was eulogized by Mr. Stephen Wood (our Jim Wood's great grandfather) and two of Stephen's sons, John Jay Wood and Henry Wood. John Jay Wood had served as President of the Club, as would his younger brother James II.

The following year, at the April 24th meeting (150 years ago next week), the minutes were read and approved. Mr. O. Green then reported the topic for discussion for the meeting would be

“progress.” He said further that he thought that the topic would allow for discussion of whether entirely different methods and branches of farming were not better for us to follow than those in which we may now be engaged. He proposed as a general topic “Leaks in the Farm and How to Stop Them.” He added, “We are near the city of New York, and the example of the city has its influence on us. Taxes are high, and all the expenses of living are high. It costs us more to live than formerly, and we must make every foot of ground tell. It will not pay us to follow the methods of fifty years ago in our farming. Let us help each other with our ideas and experience, and do what we can to improve the profit of our calling.”

Mr. Hollingsworth Wood suggested that Mr. Green reduce his idea to a question for discussion. The secretary then asked Mr. Green the different form the discussion might take and proposed concentrating on one of the “Farm Leaks” which could be “economy in the use of manure.” Objection was heard that before the next meeting the use of manure for the present season would be over. Therefore manure should be discussed at the present meeting, and Mr. Henry Wood then proposed the following: Does it pay to raise grain in the Town of Bedford? This was agreed on to be the subject for discussion at the next meeting.

The youngest of Stephen and Phebe Wood’s sons, James Wood II, was born in 1839 and was elected as Bedford Town Supervisor at the age of 24. He would subsequently serve as President of various organizations, notably the Westchester Historical Society, the American Bible Society, and of course the Farmer’s Club from 1907 to 1925. He would also create the Bedford Town Seal and write the incredibly interesting The History of the Town of Bedford to 1917. This history covers all areas of Bedford life.... schools, churches, home industries, geography, rope and leather making, flora, fauna, birds, etc. However, Page 1 of the book talks about what he thinks is most important--- the character of our Town of Bedford. He says that, like a human personality, towns have personalities and that his description of Bedford states that, “Those who are native here never feel quite at home elsewhere. Those who come here to reside for a time become conscious of an indescribable something which holds them here.” Clearly James Wood II loved his town.

In this history, which I recommend to all for reading, James Wood intersperses his factual description of Bedford with a sense of humor. And there is one brief story that I would like to share.

James related that, before the Harlem Railroad was built, two brothers -- whose surname was Gardner and who had been whaling captains in Nantucket, Massachusetts --settled where Bedford Hills now is. Afterward these brothers for long periods of years held the positions of railroad station agents at Bedford and Purdys. They made their purchases in Sing Sing, as did all the countryside, One day, the father of the writer (which would have been Stephen Wood) met one of the brothers driving home with his horses running at top speed and called: “Captain Gardner, what is the matter?” The reply was, “I have bought a new bonnet for Mrs. Gardner, and I am hurrying home for fear it will be out of fashion before I get there.”

At the April 1918 meeting of the Farmer’s Club, President Wood opened the meeting by calling attention to the work of the Farmerettes. If you are not familiar with the Farmerettes, they were a nationally developed group of women who took on the jobs of farmers who were serving the country in the first World War. In Bedford, many of the women worked at the Woodcock Farm (now known as Bedford Honour on Cantitoe Street). President Wood said that he found that, “Their superior intelligence and strong will power made them the most valuable farm workers to be found.”

The theme is recurrent. Our Jim's father and James II's son, Hollingsworth, at a meeting of the Club in August of 1927 (when Hollingsworth was serving the first of his 25 years as President) brought the meeting to a close by giving his father's recipe for the long life of the Club: "Simplicity of its methods, intelligence of its members, and high social character of its gatherings." There were other statements as well. One is provided as a poem written in 1935 by club member George Hunter. Excerpted here, he wrote:

*In eighteen hundred and fifty two
Our Farmer's Club was then brand new
Organized in Bedford Town
By men of culture and renown;
When men were not ashamed to toil
And earn their bread by tilling the soil.
Though eighty years and more have flown,
Our Club still lives and how it's grown
Eighty-two years, it seems so long
And now two hundred and fifty strong
And names still come from every direction
To wait their day of election.
We've merchants, mechanics, and men of profession
And a great host of others make up the procession.
The ladies of late have joined our ranks
For whom we are glad and offer thanks.
It's fine to have them in our band
Because they'll always be on hand;
And they'll address us now and then
For they can talk as well as men.*

*Our secretary's a useful man
Collects all our dues, that is if he can
And sticks to his post so faithful and true
And keeps perfect tabs on all that we do.
And so we're all happy
Our Club's going strong
We enjoy all the speakers as they come along.
And how safe and contented we should feel
With dear Brother Hollingsworth holding the wheel.
There'll not be a thing to bother our nerves,
For he'll take us carefully 'round all the curves;
So we'll look toward the future without any fear
And we'll all meet together twelve times every year.*

In 1966, Donald Marshall, then Town Historian, wrote: "Today, few of us, even in the Farmer's Club, are farmers, but I think you will find that what maintains the character of Bedford today is that the people who live here, the old-timers and the young newcomers, have a genuine love of country life and its relative simplicity in this complex age."

Six years later, in 1973, at a meeting of the Club, Wilhelmina Waller (third generation owner of the Tanrackin Farm) shared some of her memories of the Farmer's Club. "I can remember as a

little girl when it met at our house with my grandfather and father. You could see the Brooklyn Bridge from the top of the hill." As to the evolution of the Farmer's Club, she said, "It's for people who like ecology, animals, birds and growing things, and about using modern methods."

In the year 2000, our James Wood was elected to be the President of the Club, and in the years since we have visited many terrific venues and had the pleasure of listening to many interesting speakers.

Certainly our Jim (James III) and his loving lady Twink are a very significant part of our Club's history and deserving of our appreciation.