

TUG HILL LITERARY REVIEW



WINTER 2021

Volume IV, Number 2

*"A collection of original poetry, prose and book reviews by writers past and present from the Tug Hill,
Eastern Lake Ontario Region"*

Compiled by

Shawn Doyle, Richard Palmer, Debbie Quick and Erin Bacon Klarner
Senior Editors Marcy Newman and Carol Thompson

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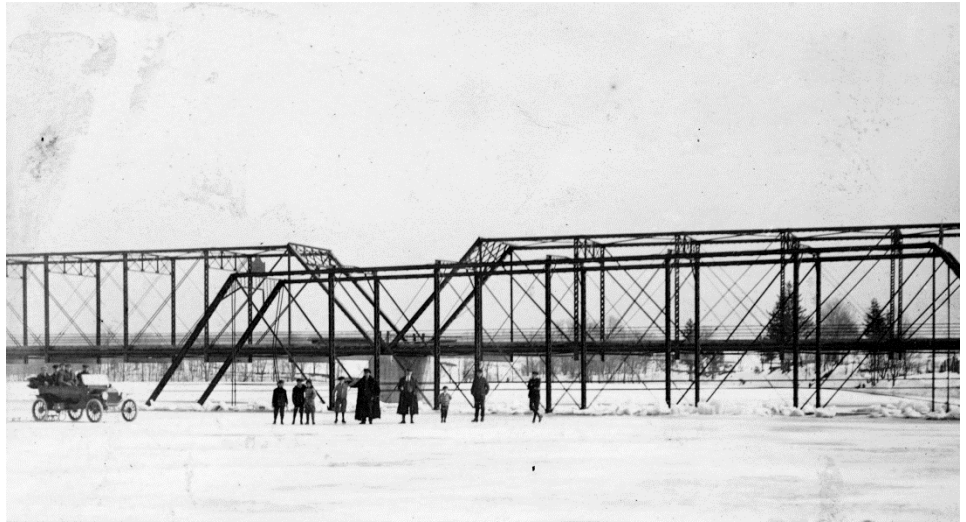
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Cover: Redfield residents on the frozen Salmon River Reservoir in the winter of 1913-14. Dean Williams and Herm Clemens and families are in the car. In the initial years of the reservoir, it was a sport to drive on the ice from Redfield Square to the dam were an access road on the south led to Pipeline Road and the Village of Altmar. Below Right: The same group of people on the cover, gathered around the old and new (in 1913) Salmon River bridges in Redfield just south of "the Clubhouse".

Thank You....

We are delighted by the enthusiastic support we have received since the return issue of the *Review* came out in December. A few members of the Tryon family contacted us to ask how they were related to Levi Tryon who penned the 1820 poem on the sinking of the *Asp*. It was rewarding to provide genealogies to these friends and show that the early settlers were quite literate and engaged in affairs around them.



Beginning with this issue, we welcome our old friends at the Historical Association of South Jefferson back into the cooperative fold. Henceforth, we will share editorial work and each issue will be sent to paid members of both organizations.

As we write, the winter is thus far reasonably mild; however as in the days of blizzards old, many are home. This winter, we are in the grip of a different isolation caused by the great pandemic. While we wait for this to pass, it is instructive to remember the suffering of our forebearers in similar situations 100 years ago and more, facing cold winters often coupled with sickness. Our ancestors survived and carried on, and they did so without the comforts (or perhaps curse) of the World Wide Web and cell phones.

As we endure these difficult times together, your historical societies in Adams and Richland remind you that we have some great winter reading to offer. We also have tremendous genealogical resources available to assist you with research into your family's heritage. Give us a call or email!

In the meantime, stay warm, and healthy. Remember better days are ahead!
The Editors

Cobblestone Buildings in the Half-Shire Region

By Richard F. Palmer

Vernacular architectural history states the use of cobblestones as construction material dates back to the third century when the Romans used them to build coastal fortifications in Great Britain. Later, they showed up in churches in England and France. Waterborne flint cobblestones were found in abundance. Natural lime mortars were perfected, but the stones were not laid in defined courses as was done in 19th century America.

There are more than 700 cobblestone structures in New York State, including not only houses but smoke houses, churches, barns, and school houses. Frequent questions asked by those interested have been "Why are these old buildings largely confined to this region, who built them, how and when?"

Why cobblestones? Primarily because they were plentiful. They had been rolled, rounded, and left by the glacier that had passed over the region. As settlers came and cleared land for homes and fields, these stones had to be reckoned with. So why not build a house with them?

Initially, they were used to build miles of dry-stone wall fences separating the farm fields. Many went into structure foundations. Gradually they were applied to above-ground construction.

At first, rough field stones were used. As the skill and artistry of the masons developed, water-washed stones were gathered from the shores of Lake Ontario where nearly 100 miles of washed stones of every form could be collected. Dismissed is the notion that when the Erie Canal was completed, masons turned to cobblestone construction. It is an entirely different craft. Scattered records point to English itinerant masons having worked throughout the region.

Each mason developed an individual style and technique, preparing his own mortar. The real secret of a good cobblestone wall depended on the quality of mortar used. Whether fact or fancy, it has been said that often if a visitor came around, a mason would stop everything and wait for them to pass so as not to have his special skills observed. The average mason was paid between \$1 and \$1.25 per day, plus board, for a 10-to-12-hour day.

Cobblestone construction was a slow process, tedious and exacting, more so as cobblestone structures became more elaborate. Generally, it took up to two years to build the typical cobblestone farmhouse. Only the wealthier landowners could afford them.

Also, many cobblestone schoolhouses, smokehouses, and barns were constructed. Cobblestone foundations are quite common in upstate New York. Interest in this topic is fostered by the Cobblestone Society located at Childs, N.Y. Detailed information on this topic as well as an inventory of cobblestone structures can be found at:

<http://www.cobblestonemuseum.org/CobblestoneStructuresCatalog/CM0000.htm>

(All photos in the article are by the author unless otherwise noted)

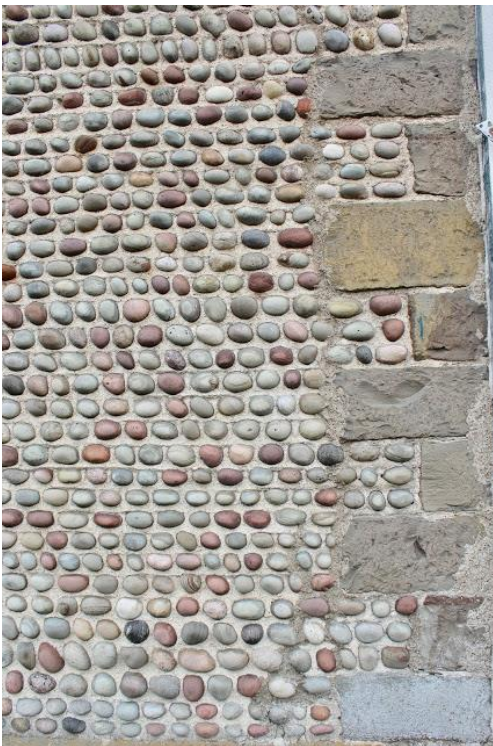
About the author: Richard Palmer

A native of Palmyra, N.Y., Richard Palmer was a long-time reporter and editor for various newspapers in the Syracuse area. He has authored many books and articles on local history, his focus being early transportation. He is also a member of the Cobblestone Society and writes a weekly column, "On the Waterfront," for the Oswego Palladium-Times, focusing on Lake Ontario maritime history.

Richard is married to the former Jean Bumaster, who herself is a past board member of the Central New York Genealogy Society. During her time on that board, Jean was team leader for Local History-Genealogy.



One of the finest examples of cobblestone construction is the 1846-vintage Hamilton House at 164 Hamilton St., Mexico. The book, *Landmarks of Oswego County* by Judith Wellman, noted "...with its wide frieze and corner pilasters, it displays the solidity and sense of permanence so closely associated with the Greek Revival style." It was constructed by Richard Hamilton and his two sons who hauled the cobblestones by oxcart from Lake Ontario after delivering produce to be shipped to Oswego by boat. David Wilcox was the architect and supervised its construction.



This house at 7972 Route 3 in the Town of Richland was built about 1854 by Charles B. Pratt (1824-1886). The facing consists of water-polished stones of various colors collected from the Lake Ontario shoreline. The corner quoins are of quarried granite (detail on left).

According to Donald Pratt of Pulaski, his great-grandfather Charles Pratt and family hauled these stones from family property at nearby Rainbow Shores.



This cobblestone structure on Tryon Road in the town of Sandy Creek was part front of a frame house that was taken down several years many years ago.

According to Donald Pratt, this work may have been done by Charles Pratt. The home was owned by Earl Tryon (1903-1992). (Photo by Shawn Doyle)



Receiving vault at Riverside Cemetery, north side, County Route 22, Altmar. Today these structures were built to hold bodies pending burial (normally during winter months) and are generally used as tool sheds now.



This house at 190 Sheepskin Road, Altmar, reputedly built in 1850 by John McKeniry whose signature was the artistic “herring bone” design.



190 Sheepskin Road, Altmar, same house many years ago before it was painted.



The Pineville Methodist Church on the north side of Route 13 between Pulaski and Altmar was built with a cobblestone foundation in 1850 by John McKeniry.

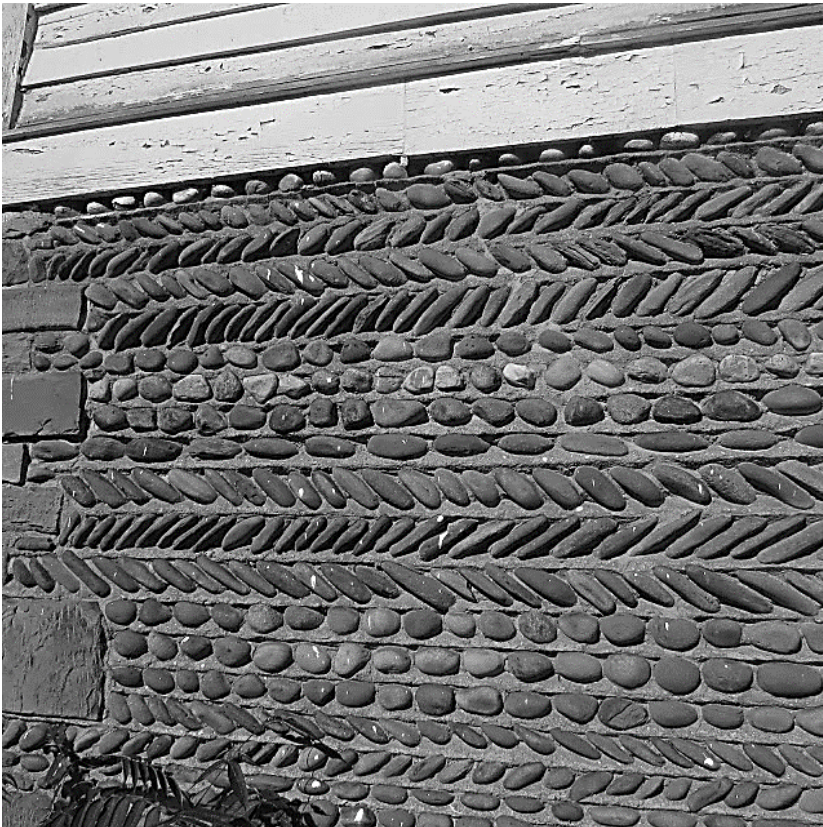
The church was dedicated in 1851 and was used for services until 1968 when the congregation merged with the Riverside United Methodist Church in Altmar. A steeple and bell once adorned the roof. John McKeniry¹ was born in County Claire, Ireland about 1826 and died on April 3, 1876 in the

Town of Albion, Oswego County. He was a truly a talented stone mason.

The cobblestones were hauled from Lake Ontario by members of the congregation.

For many years it was owned by Dottie and Dave Balcom and housed a craft store. McKeniry also built the cobblestone house on nearby Sheepskin Road. He may have also built the cobblestone vault at Riverside Cemetery in Altmar (previous pages) as well as cobblestone foundations for local houses. The church sanctuary was lit by hanging kerosene lamps. Music was provided by an old-fashioned pump organ.

(Left) Detail of artistic cobblestone work on Pineville Methodist Church.



¹ Several descendants of John and Ellen (Burns) McKeniry reside in our region. Half-Shire Life Member Jeff Edick of Pulaski is also a talented stone mason in his own right.



This cobblestone foundation can be seen on a house at 1978 Mexico Street in Altmar.



Cobblestone School District #7 was located on the Sandy Creek-Ellisburg Road southwest of the Village of Mannsville in the Town of Ellisburg. It was the only known cobblestone building in Jefferson County. The rural school district was merged with Mannsville Central School District about 1930 and the building was subsequently demolished.

(Photo courtesy of Historical Society of South Jefferson)

Diamond

(From the *Jefferson County Journal* March 17, 1943)

*There's nothing much to write about,
Just storm and wind and snow;
We've had so much of that, of late,
So it's not news, you know.*

*We go to visit no one,
And no one visits us;
We're saving gas for Uncle Sam
So we don't make a fuss.*

*People here don't waste the gas,
They use just what they need
To make their weekly trip to town
For groceries and feed.*

*They don't go out to dances,
Or even to a show;
How do they know what's going on?
Why! Phone and radio.*

*Our plunky Diamond school ma'am
Gets to her home weekends;
She goes part way on snowshoes,
They've been her greatest friends.*

*So when the storms are over
And we get on bare ground;
Perhaps there'll be a little news
When folks can get around.*

Dean District News Column²

(From the *Jefferson County Journal*, February 12, 1936)

*The phone's out of order,
'N the road's full o'snow—
So what's happening to neighbors,
Is more than I know.*

*The aerial's down,
So we just get three stations;
The drain is stopped up,
So there's no filtration.*

*I hope folks are well
And haven't been sick
But if things open up,
You'll get the news quick.*

*Some may have got married,
Others may have twins:
But I can't get the news—
For the blizzard still wins*

*I'm sick of Old Winter,
And ready to go—
To the land that's all sunshine,
Were warm breezes blow.*

*However, I'm thankful,
When I read other's fate:
That there's Coal in the cellar
And food on my plate.*

² (neighborhood between Mannsville & Ellisburg)

Winter 2021 images from across the

(Right) A December 2020 view of the “Dry Bridge” over the Old Syracuse Northern Railroad Line (now CSX) just south of Fernwood. Photo taken by Forest “Jim” Hall of Fernwood.

The historic wooden deck bridge that connected east and west Dry Bridge roads has been closed over 20 years due to safety. The braces are owned by the railroad, the deck was maintained by Oswego County and the railings the town of Richland under the original maintenance agreement.

(Richard Palmer wanted this photo re-shot with an oncoming train, we opted out of that adventure...)



Meanwhile up in Boylston our friends in the Winona Forest are readying for three big events. The annual cross-country ski “Try-It Race,” which is scheduled for Saturday, January 23, 2021, and the Winona Forest Tourathon is on Saturday, February 6, 2021 are two eagerly anticipated cross country ski events. Additional information regarding on these races can be found on the Winona website at www.winonaforest.com and registration information and details can be found at www.skireg.com.



The eagerly anticipated 2021 Stone Wall Snowshoe Race will be held Sunday January 24, 2021. This traditional 5k and 10K snowshoe race is always a great time and a chance to enjoy the great outdoors in this wonderful region.

This event is sold out. For more information contact race organizer Matt Westerlund at: snowshoerace@gmail.com

Tug Hill/Eastern Lake Ontario Region



(Left) "Breaking Quarantine" for a visit, Paul Yerdon and wife Marion welcomed Victor Yerdon and his wife Darlene to their Central Square home. Paul and Victor are the last grandchildren of Abraham Yerdon (1837-1923). Both men have a vast store of stories about early life on Tug Hill, and they enjoy their meetings to reminisce.

(Right) Downtown Adams, winter 1929 (From the files of the Historical Association of South Jefferson).



(Left) The children of Lyndon and Yvonne (Ballou) Walker outside their Redfield home during the winter of 1950: Lynda with Diane, Ron, Bill and Merrill "Butch" Walker.

(Bill passed away in 1999, Butch in 2002. Lynda, Ron and Diane are among our readers.)

A BLACK RIVER THAW

A story is told of a traveler bold
In the days of the Hartford coach.
In a big blanket rolled, for the weather was cold,
Here he went just as snug as a roach.
But the snow gathers deep as northward they creep,
And the snow rising higher he saw.
And the driver he cried to the man by his side:
"We shall soon get a Black River thaw."

Then the man in the coach lying snug as a roach
Gently smiled like an infant at sleep;
But the horses' slow gait never told him his fate
In the snowdrifts so wide and so deep.
At last came a shout and they tumbled him out,
And a sleigh was his fate then, he saw;
But a man with a sigh pointed up to the sky,
Saying, "Here comes a Black River thaw."

"Let it come," said our man, "just as quick as it can,
For I never was fond of the snow;
Let it melt from the hills, let it run down the rills,
Then back to our coach we may go."
But the wind raised its song, and the snow sailed along,
And the cold it was piercing and raw,
And the man in the rug, from his coverings snug,
Wished and prayed for the Black River thaw.

When the sleigh with its load reached the old Boonville road,
Where the drifts reared themselves mountain high,
Glenfield on the right buried deep out of sight,
Left a white desert plain 'neath the sky.
Not a fence or a tree could the traveler see,
As he cowered close down in the straw,
And the driver he sighed as the prospect he eyed,
"By George! Here's a Black River thaw."

While he spoke, lo! The team disappeared with a scream,
And the drift quickly closed overhead:
While they wildly looked back, lo! The snow hides the track
And is drifting high over the sled.
Then the traveler bold, though decrepit and old,
Hurled that driver down in the straw, crying out, "Driver, speak, ere my vengeance I wreak,
What d'ya mean by a Black River thaw?"

Then, the old gossips say, he arose in the sleigh
And extended his hand o'er the scene,
And he laughed and he shrieked, and the sleigh groaned and creaked,
And he said, "I will tell what I mean:
When the north wind doth blow and there's five feet of snow,
And the ice devils nibble and gnaw,
When the snow fills your eyes and the drifts quickly rise,
This is known as a Black River thaw."

Then the traveler arose, and he smote him with blows,
And they sank in a deadly embrace;
And none knew the spot till the June sun was hot,
And a hunter, by chance, found the place.
Here they made them a grave where the storms madly rave.,
And this epitaph lately I saw:
"Two men lie beneath, and they came by their death
Frozen stiff in a Black River thaw."

Written by Rev. Alonzo Teall Worden (c1868)

About the Author:

Rev. Alonzo Teal Worden was born April 11, 1841 in Prospect, Oneida County, New York, the son of Calvin Worden (1811-1872) and Julia Ann Teall (1818-1891). Alonzo was raised in Prospect, which is located above the headwaters of the Black River.

At the age of 18, Worden headed west and settled in Saratoga, Minnesota. When the Civil War began, Worden enlisted in the Minnesota Volunteers where he advanced to the rank of sergeant.

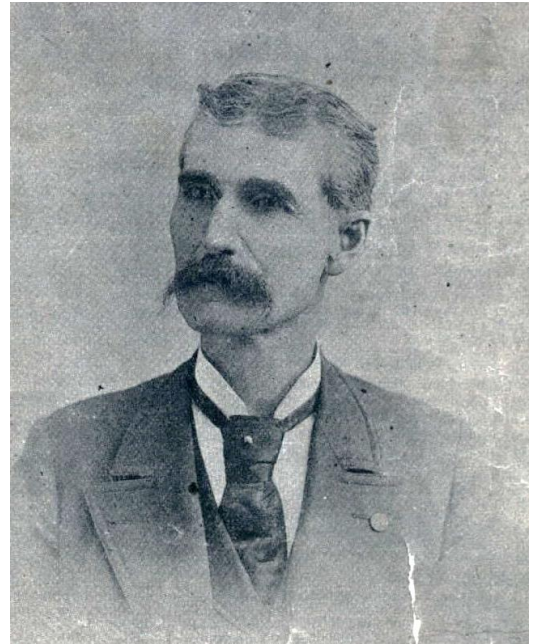
At the close of the war, Worden returned to Oneida County and joined the Baptist Church becoming a preacher. Known as the "Preacher Poet", Rev. Worden served across the Mohawk Valley, including Ames, Montgomery County where he served the longest and died on December 6, 1896 at the age of 55.

Rev. Worden was a regular contributor to popular magazines of the time such as *Leslie's* and *Judge*. His poetry captured the popular imagination with his optimism and warm verse.

"A Black River Thaw" was first printed in the *Utica Republican* about 1868. It was reprinted many times over the years in various newspapers, and its author adapted its verse for the community of Chateaugay in Northern New York.

A Black River thaw is described as a rapid change in winter weather from a good day to a terrible storm. This rapid change is peculiar to most of our Tug Hill region.

(For more on Rev. Alonzo Teal Worden contact Half-Shire or HASJEFF)



Alonzo Teal Worden likely didn't copyright his poetry on the Black River Thaw. Nineteenth and twentieth century newspapers across Northern New York ran his poem and its variants many times over the years. The place names were changed in some. The following poem by the same name was discovered in the *Watertown Re-Union* January 18, 1877:

"A Black River Thaw"

Had Dean Swift lived in Northern, New York, he would have changed his "description of a City Shower" to a "Diatribes Against a Black River Thaw" something after this style

Careful observers may by instinct know,
(By sure prognostics) when to look for snow,
A coming storm your shooting horns presage,
Old aches will throb, your hollow tooth will rage;
Haunting the office, "weather Wise" is seen;
He damns the climate and complains of spleen:
Meanwhile the North, rising with dabbled wings,
A sable cloud athwart the welkin flings:

Not yet the snow had shunned the unequal strife,
But goaded by the wind, fought still for life,
And Wafted by its foe with violent blow
"Twas doubtful which was wind and which was snow;
Ah! Where must needy poet seek for aid
When wind and snow at once his coat invade:
How in great solid chunks the snow comes down
Threatening to bury all of Watertown!

Here various kinds, by various fortunes led
Commence acquaintance underneath a shed;
Despondent Rads, victorious Democrats;
Forget their feuds and join to save their hats,
Now in all parts the swelling snow banks rise,
And hold as trophies, every train that tries,
To plow its way through various huge odd drifts,
That to the sky their big round back uplifts,

Then as each snow bank drives with rapid force
From Williamstown to Richland shape their course,
And in huge Confluence join at Sandy Creek,
They gather force until they come so thick
That trains are stopped and everybody's blue
Till Moak gets mad and puts the snow plow through!

Book and Subject reviews

We will select books to review each quarter from our sales cabinet and offer insight into their value and content. Interesting subjects pertaining to the region will also be considered, with various books cited for further reading. Local authors who contribute to the history and culture of the greater Tug Hill region will also be considered for review.

Dick's Great Adventure -*From Rags to Riches Without Leaving Oswego County*

© 2017 Richard T. Brennan *Reviewed by Shawn Doyle*

Several years ago, the now late Richard Brennan, a well-known figure in our region, stopped by Half-Shire to do some research. I inquired about his interest and he told me he was writing his life story. We assisted Dick in his documentation of Boylston schools, St. Joseph's Church there, as well as some family records. Later that week, Dick's childhood friend, Margaret Kastler, our Sandy Creek trustee, stopped in and was looking for similar things. While here, she showed me some of the draft papers Dick had her looking over to fact check. Many of us were anxious to see the end result!

In late 2016, Dick phone me to tell me the book was done and would soon be printed. Soon after the initial run, we learned that Dick passed away at his home in Florida on February 21, 2017. Through the generosity of Dick's family, we were able to obtain a couple cases of these memoirs, and we still have several copies on hand for sale.

Richard Thomas Brennan was born in the Town of Boylston on October 20, 1934. He was the son of John J. Brennan, a farmer and logger from a family of Irish-Canadian Immigrants, and Elsie Bessie Ingersoll, a "Pulaski girl" who had gone to Boylston as a young teacher and fell in love with and married the elder Brennan. Dick was the eldest of the couple's five children, and the chapters on his early years offer a rare insight on a lifestyle now past. The Brennan children grew up on Tug Hill, attending first a rural school and later Sandy Creek Central. Dick was a good athlete and also possessed sharp intellect. He was encouraged by his mother to continue his education and went on to Ohio University where he earned his Civil Engineering Degree. Throughout college, Dick constantly worked part-time jobs to be able to afford his education and to have some spending money. His stories of this period are funny and instructive as the young man put himself through college.

Dick returned home and went to work for New York State Department of Transportation where he was employed 20 years. He married young, began a family, and later separated and remarried. Like his early years, Dick describes his efforts to balance life at home, difficult work projects and efforts to "get ahead" in life to provide a better life for himself and his growing family. He is self-critical at some points and holds very little back.

In the early 1960s, Dick identified a business opportunity to develop some property along the eastern shore of Lake Ontario. The initial lease ended was later purchased and subsequently developed into one of the largest recreational vehicle parks on the east coast, Brennan's Beach. The rest is history...

In his narrative, Dick "tells it as it was" in his view, and his unvarnished stories will have the reader laughing out loud as well as shaking one's head in surprise and sometimes disbelief. Like the Sinatra song, Dick did it "his way" and his determination and vision to see his life project, Brennan's Beach through to success is quite admirable.

Dick's Great Adventure is a fun read, and can be viewed as an inspiration in the tradition of Horatio Alger...with an angle that only Dick Brennan could work. I highly recommend this 400-page book, offered by us for \$25 which includes tax and shipping (\$22 if picked up in Richland).

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The Half-Shire Historical Society

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