

Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

After reading the articles on Cragsmoor by Lucy Muller in the *Wawarsing.Net*, I thought maybe people might be interested to know what it was like in Cragsmoor in the early 1900s.

I lived in Cragsmoor the first 25 years of my life (1910 to 1936) and had ties to Cragsmoor for the next 25 years through my parents who lived here most of their married life (60 years).

This was before electricity, indoor plumbing, radio, TV, snowplows, and school buses. There were about 12 families who called Cragsmoor their home. They didn't leave in September and return in May or June the next year, but lived there and kept Cragsmoor alive. Some of these people were born there and spent their whole life there. They really kept Cragsmoor alive during the winter months.

When the heavy snows came, the men got together with horses and shovels and opened a road to Ellenville by way of the **Gully Road**. This was volunteer work with no pay. When automobiles became more plentiful in the 1920s, the road to Ellenville was opened by way of the **Plank Road**. Snowplows finally came in the late 1930s.

For entertainment, we made our own. There were a few radios in the 1920s but they weren't used much because the batteries had to be taken to Ellenville to be recharged. Electricity finally came to Cragsmoor in the middle 1920s, but not everyone had it. The younger people had sleigh-riding and ice-skating on the ponds and, if the snow was too deep, hiking to **Sam's Point** and skating on **Lake Maratanza**. There were house parties and dinners at the *Federated Church* and just visiting your neighbor for talks and gossip.

The children walked to the one-room school (now a private home) in all kinds of weather. There were no snow days. Several of us walked to high school in Ellenville, also, in all kinds of weather. (No snow days there either.) Snow could be 2 inches to 2 feet in those days. These people didn't complain about the cold, the snow, or the condition of the roads either. People didn't have to go to Ellenville much for groceries because they bought their staples, like flour, sugar, and coffee, before the snows came. They grew and canned their fruit and vegetables and items like eggs, fresh milk, and meat they could buy or trade with their neighbor who had them.

Cragsmoor had artists like Geo. Ennis, Jr., Chas. Curran, EL Henry, Miss Turnasthan. In a way, Cragsmoor had their own local artists of special works: The Keri Bros, Lawrence & Colin, for their masonry works; Bert Goldsmith, with carpentry and moving houses; Lenard Marl, for his stone walls and stone steps. Visit the **Library** and you can see some of their work.

Cragsmoor has grown since those times, but it has also lost some of its charm and a lot of landmarks, like the **Harnhut** (Kite House) with the view of **Mt. Mongola**, Ellenville, and the **Catskills Mountains**, *Barnstormers Theatre*, *Blakely Fields Restaurant*, the *Frank B. Road-head Boarding House* (with its bungalows), the *Mance and Kinberg Boarding Houses*. In 1930, two local young men, Liels Goldsmith and Bud Marl, had a garage with a gas pump out front on the corner of **Gully Road** and **Sam's Point Road**. They even had a taxi service during the summer months. Across the road from the *Federated Church* was *Garritt's Store and Post Office*, a place you could buy candy, tobacco, and ice cream in the summer. It also had gas pumps out front.

Then there was the *Cragsmoor Inn*, a real hotel with pavilion, theatre and a building called the Casino with a bowling alley, pool tables, and guestrooms. These buildings were connected to the hotel by a covered boardwalk. Then there was a well-kept 9-hole golf course and Mrs. Sturdevant's (the owner) famous Rose Garden.

Another great place was Mr. and Mrs. Ennis's summer home (later known as *Vista Maria*); *Chatolla*, as it was called, had a large picture gallery and Ms. Ennis's studio, terraces, and flower gardens. From there, one had a wonderful view of Orange County. On clear days, you could see Bear Mountain and Northern New Jersey. Their home was opened to the public one day a week during July and August. There were other things to see like the **Stone Pigeon Tower**, **Laly Pond** with a statue and lots of gold fish, the **Lily Pond** full of pond lilies and giant frogs, the gate houses with their huge gates, and a pigeon loft under the garages.

The people of those families who kept Cragsmoor alive during the winter months were interesting people doing interesting things. I'm sure great stories could have been told about their lives in Cragsmoor. I have many fond memories of those people and places of Cragsmoor way back then. Yes, and with the 25 years there, I am still living within 15 miles of Good Old Cragsmoor.

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