

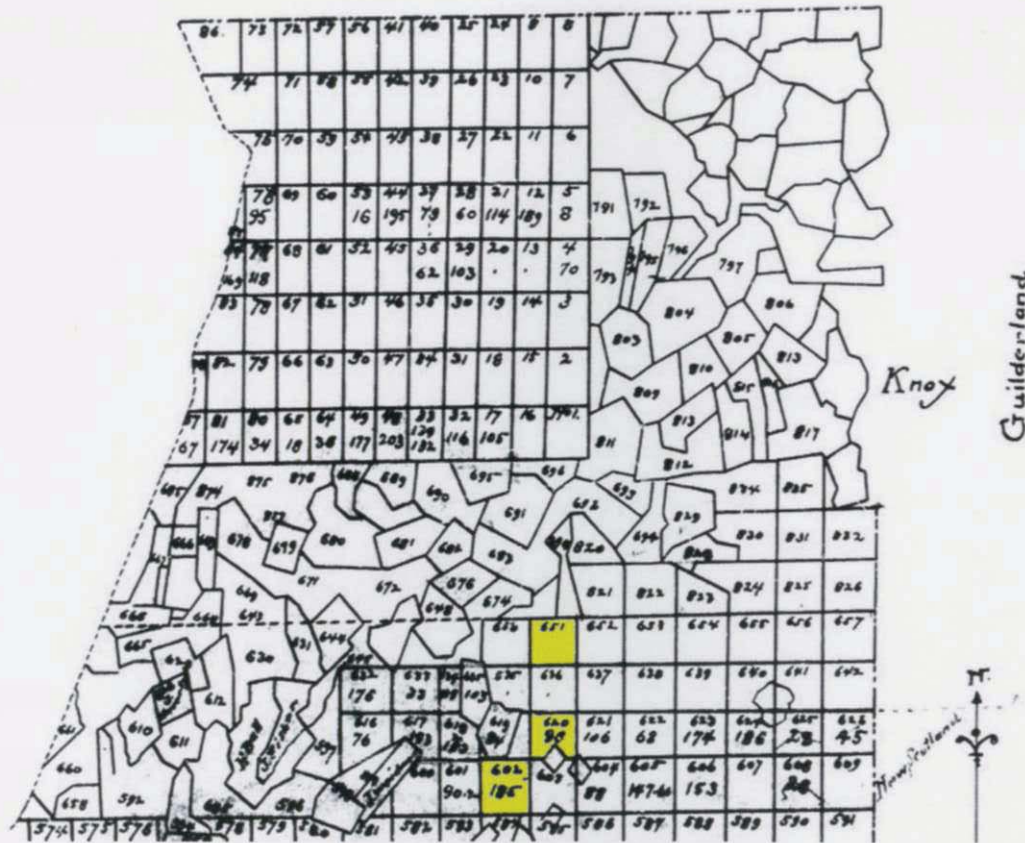
Grandma and Grandpa White

My Memories of their Life on a Farm in Knox



*By Margaret Nicholson
Torok*

The family lore handed down is that George White and five of his brothers came on horseback from the Groton Heights and Stonington areas of Connecticut to the Van Rensselaerwyck patent.



This 1787 Cockburn survey map gives lot numbers. The Van Rensselaer Rent Book lists George White on lots #602 and #620 in 1793; and lot 651 in 1795, colored here in yellow.

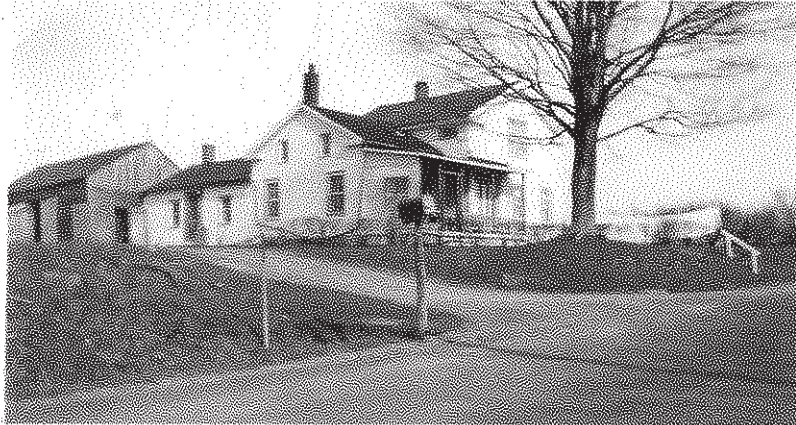
The present house was erected and completed in 1874 when my grandfather, Alvy White, was four years of age. Alvy White was the fourth generation of the George White Family and was born on February 12, 1869, the son of George J. White and Catherine Saddlemire.

In 1913 Alvy married Ethel Hotaling, daughter of Herman Hotaling and Sarah Wilday of Gallupville. My maternal grandparents Alvy and Ethel Hotaling White, lived on the White Homestead from 1913-1958 and had 6 children.

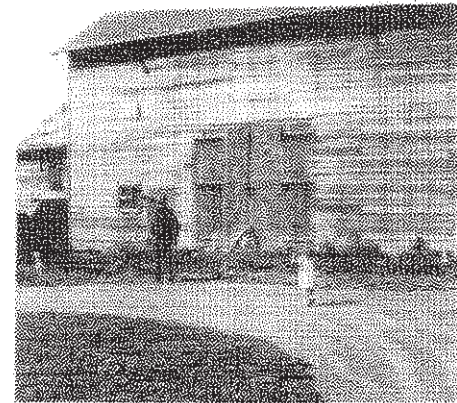


White Family: Back row Hattie, Dorothy, Edith ; Middle Row- Mildred, Hilda; Bottom Row - Bernard.

In 1925 the original barn was struck by lightning and the barn and other out-buildings were destroyed. Alvy purchased a barn from Guilderland Township. It was taken down and transported by horse and wagons to the White farm.

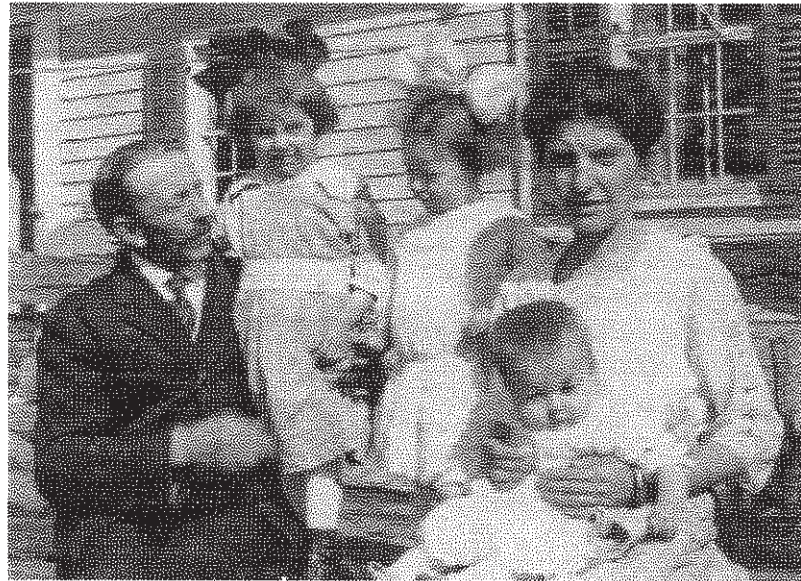


White Homestead, c1952. Knox Cave/Warner Lake Road bisects the property.

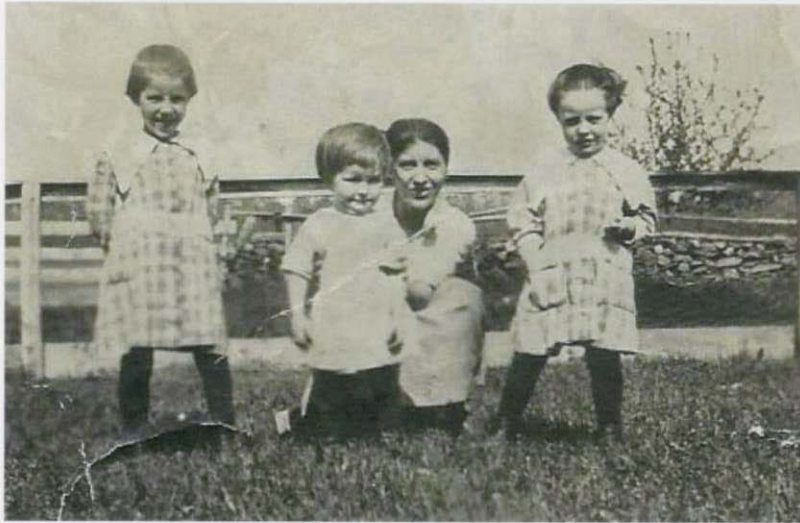


Barn that was transported from Guilderland.

When my mother, Mildred, and her siblings were young they would all get in one of the surreys in the morning after chores and Grandpa would drive them to Gallupville to visit Grandma's relatives. They would have to leave soon after the noon meal to get back to the farm in time to get the cows in from the pasture and milk them.



*Alvy and Ethel with three of their daughters,
Mildred, Hattie, and Hilda.*



*Mother Ethel with 3
daughters Mildred, Hilda,
and Hattie.*

In the winter when the snow was deep Grandpa would drive the children across the fields to the one room school house they attended and come pick them up after school.



*School District No.3, located at intersection of Pleasant Valley
Road and Tabor Road.*

Alvy White was a trustee of this school in 1925.

My parents, Mildred White Nicholson and Patrick Nicholson, and I lived with my grandparents until I was four years old. I have vivid memories of my grandparents' farm because we visited often. The homestead had electricity but not running water. There was a dug well just outside the summer kitchen door and a big cistern in the cellar that was filled by water from the gutter system on the house. There was a hand pump on the sink in the kitchen.



My father, Pat Nicholson, and my grandmother, Ethel White, holding me.

I would spend a week at Grandma's house during the summers helping Grandma. A typical busy day for her was: in the morning, she would get dressed and put on one of her aprons she had made using the cloth feed bags the chicken feed came in and make breakfast.



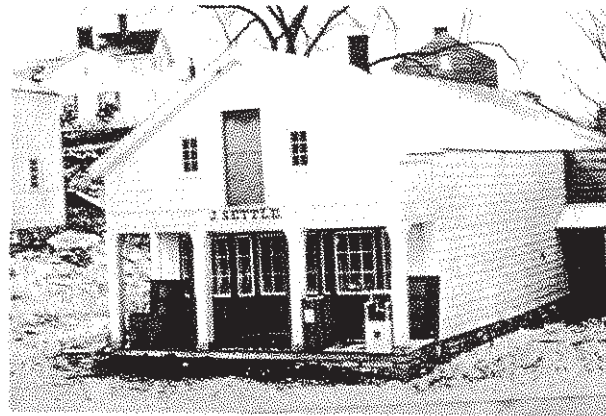
This feedsack apron was made by Jane McLean, former KHS member, in 2014.



East Berne Mill, 1944.

Breakfast was usually sausage and gravy with buckwheat pancakes made from the starter she kept in a big brown earthenware pitcher or oatmeal made with the oats Grandpa had grown, harvested and taken to East Berne with his horses and wagon to be ground at the mill. The adults had green tea. Green tea was served at every meal. Grandpa liked his with lots of milk and sugar.

A little later, after she had washed the dishes and I had dried them, we would go to gather the eggs from the hen house and feed the chickens. Grandma would barter the eggs the family did not use with Barton's store in Berne for groceries she needed. Every Friday morning, she would pick off the receiver of the tall black telephone in the kitchen and tell the operator the number of Barton's store. She would give her order to whomever answered the phone at the store. A little later someone would deliver her order and take the eggs.



Called Barton's Store during Grandma White's time, this store in the hamlet of Berne has had many names from the original Jacob Settle's Store to the present Fox Creek Market.

We would also feed the pigs and they were always excited, pushing each other out of the way to get to the potato and other vegetable peelings she would toss in the troughs for them. Back in the summer kitchen, Grandma would then separate the milk Grandpa had brought in from the barn earlier. When she had enough cream, she would pour it into the tall blue butter churn. I always wanted to help with the dasher but was not tall enough to do it by myself. Eventually the butter was ready to be taken out and put in the big wooden bowl and grandma would work out all the liquid. In the summer, she had customers from the city who came every week to buy butter.



Kitchen in the KHS Saddlemire Homestead shows dairy-related items. The Davis swing churn is partially pictured at the bottom. Ellen Saddlemire's recipe for "Milk Porridge" is transcribed.

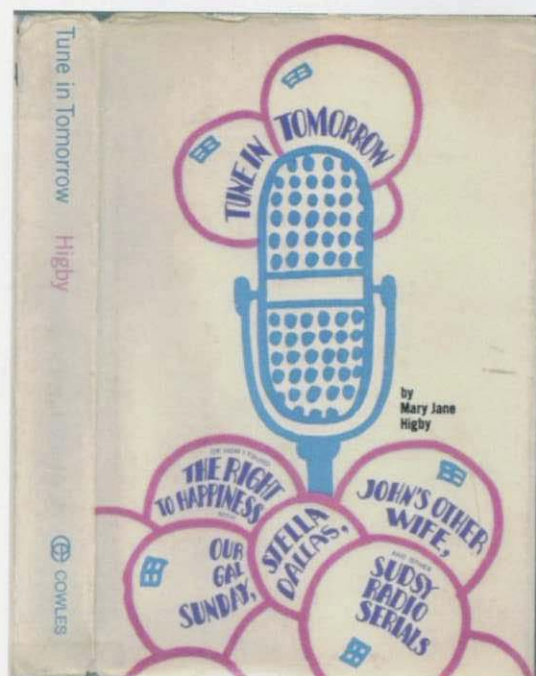
Grandma's next chore would be to get out the big bag of flour and other ingredients to make bread dough as she baked bread a few times a week during the mid-morning. The house smelled wonderful. Eating a slice with her churned butter was delicious. Then it was time to start cooking dinner. {lunchtime}.



Ethel Hotaling White

Grandma had a huge garden and would pull up sweet young carrots or beets to cook for dinner and wash them off in the rain barrel at the corner of the house next to the garden. The water was used to water the garden also. In the fall, she canned all the vegetables. She canned cherries she picked from the trees across the road from the apple orchard. Pies were made, also apple sauce from the various kinds of apple trees in the orchard. There was a grape arbor also. I remember sitting with her on the benches not eating the grapes though as they were sour.

In the afternoon, one could always find Grandma in the parlor with a pan of potatoes on her lap and a pan of water on the floor beside her rocking chair. She would peel the potatoes for supper and drop them in the water while she listened to Stella Dallas and One Man's Family. At that time, she would turn off the radio and go to the kitchen to start cooking supper. Sometimes when the other members of the family would be busy with haying, she would have to walk down the road to the cow pasture to call the cows to come to be taken to the barn for milking. The pasture had a little creek running across it and the cows liked to walk in it and get a drink. The pasture was a huge field with woods at the far end. The cows would sometimes be back under the trees and whom ever went for the cows would have to walk back there to herd them to the gate.



Ad for serialization of radio programs.

Grandpa always got up at 4:30 am to go to feed the horses and feed and milk the cows. There wasn't any electricity in the barn and he always carried a lantern to make his way to the barn. In nice weather, he would herd the cows down the road to put them in the pasture. In winter the cows stayed in the barn. There was a dug well in the barn yard and he could water the cows and horses from it.

Grandpa used some of the apples from the orchard to make cider and kept it in a big wooden barrel in the cellar.

He also planted a huge field of potatoes behind the barn. He filled the potato bin in the cellar for the family and took the rest to the farmers market in Albany with his horses and wagons. After my parents were married my dad took the back seat out of our car and filled it up with bags of potatoes and took them to the Albany Market. They always sold them all.



Public Market 1930s

Grandpa had a team of gray horses he used to pull the mower to cut the hay. This was done in the morning and by afternoon the hay would be ready to be put up on the wagon. My youngest aunt and uncle were still at home and they would go with Grandpa and toss the loose hay up on the wagon.

Occasionally the hay would slide off on the way from the fields back to the barn, twice the work for one load of hay. The hay wagon would be pulled into the barn and the horses unhitched. They would be hitched to the ropes that pulled the huge hay forks of hay to the top of the haymow. Grandma usually tripped the rope that loosened the hay fork and the hay would drop. She would sometimes let me help her do that.

When the men neighbor men came to help with the thrashing etc. Grandma would have to make big dinners for all of them.

Grandpa usually had someone come to help with the butchering of cows and pigs.



Alvy White



Kitchen stove

At night after the supper dishes were washed and put away in the pantry, we would all sit on the front porch until bed time. Grandpa would sit in his rocking chair in front of the kitchen range, opening the oven door and putting his feet just inside to warm them. Lots of times he would cut up apples with his jack knife, scrape the fruit from the peel and give it to the grandchildren. He was the first one to go to bed. Everyone else went an hour or two later.

My grandfather died on July 15, 1955.

In the fall my mother and I would go up to Grandma's house and help her can the vegetables from her garden. She had a wood burning kitchen range and they would put a big washboiler on the stove and put a bunch of newspapers on the bottom of it to cushion the Ball canning jars that were put in to be canned. They also put newspapers around the jars so they would not bump against one another. Then the boiler was filled with cold water to just above the tops of the jars. Once the water started to boil they would have to time how long it would take for the vegetables to be cooked in the jars. They would then have to wait for the water and jars to cool down somewhat before removing them to a draft free spot to cool. This was a very long time-consuming process.

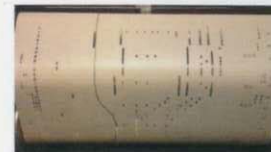


The kitchen at the Saddlemire Homestead shows Ellen Saddlemire's Cookbook, a handmade cookbook on display in the dry sink created by Louis Saddlemire (Alvy and Ethel's grandson) for the museum's opening in 1976.

Grandma entered a contest and won a brand new upright player piano. She had to finance the delivery of the piano to her home. The piano was a Boardman Gray made in Albany. We older grandchildren remember the fun we had pumping and watching the piano keys playing. Grandma had lots of rolls of music.



Boardman Gray Player Piano



Player roll

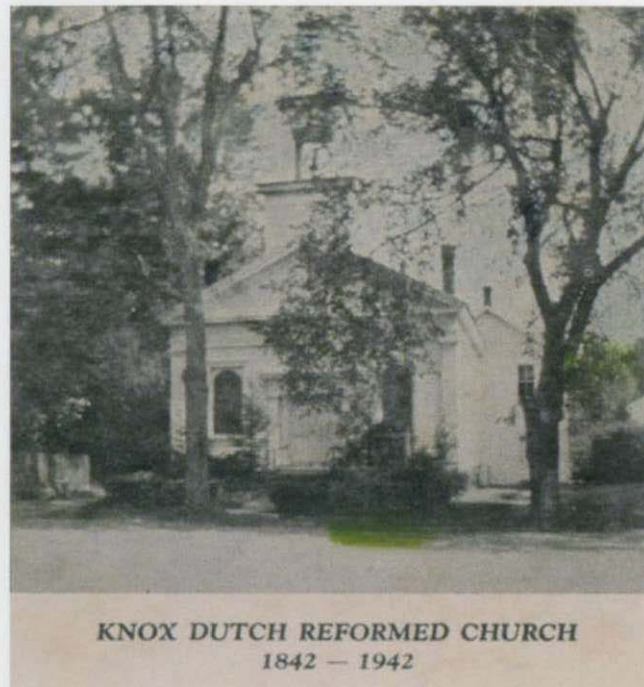
Grandma earned a bit of extra money by sewing covers on baseballs. My cousin Louis Saddlemire remembers his mother, Hilda, and my mother talking about this cottage industry. Mrs. Leyland Willsey, who is looking for baseball cover stitchers in this ad, was distantly related to my Grandma.



**WANTED--Stitchers for baseballs.
Mrs. Leyland Willsey, Berne, N. Y.**

*Help wanted ad appeared in the
Altamont enterprise,
January 17, 1936 p. 6*

Grandma White was a member of the Ladies Aid Society of the Knox Reformed Church. This dedicated, hardy group of women met once a week, every week, for the entire day and sewed, quilted, made rag rugs, had luncheons, and hosted many social events. The group elected officers and paid dues of \$.52 annually.



People in the community who had pieced tops that needed to be quilted brought the tops to the ladies. Batting and a backing were purchased and then the item was hand-quilted by the ladies who chose a quilting pattern to compliment the top piece. Quilting patterns were traced using items at hand, such as a thimble, window shade stick, and dinner plate. Over the years the quilters worked on quilt tops made in the 1800s as well as current day pieces. There was a learning curve as new members learned how to make their stitches small enough.



Ethel White



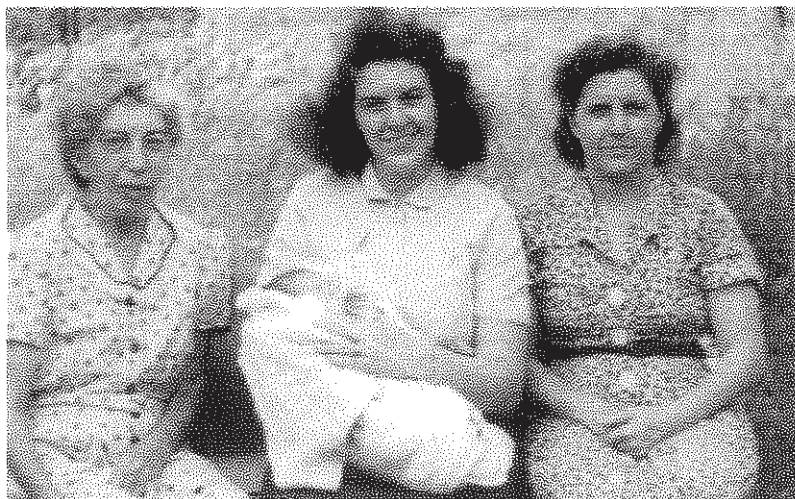
Hattie Burt, Mildred Nicholson, Maria Sidoti, and Hilda Saddlemire show the quilting technique used over the years by the Knox Church quilters. Hattie, Mildred, and Hilda were Ethel White's daughters.

Communication and transportation were quite a bit different in those days. Some of the members lived in the hamlet of Knox, but many others lived on farms, a distance from the Church. The ladies were lucky if they had a party-line phone at home to connect to the operator who could then transfer their call to the desired party if they needed to make plans for getting together. In those years few women drove a car and they usually walked to meet up for quilting day. In later years the ladies remembered that Ethel White, my grandmother, walked 2 miles each way, downhill and uphill, to get to the Church from her farm on Knox Cave Road. In the winter, Ethel was lucky and could get a ride by bobsled!

Young children accompanied their mothers and enjoyed a day of playing with friends, their version of the modern play-date.

My grandmother was a wonderful role model, a willing helpmate to her husband, a compassionate mother to her five daughters and one son, a hard worker who was always cheerful, going to stay with sick neighbors when needed and a wonderful grandmother. Sadly, when I was 12 years of age she was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. She continued to try and do whatever tasks she could and later lived with some of her children for several years. She lived to see our daughter and son, her only great grandchildren at the time of her death on January 14, 1958 at her daughter Hattie's home.

Four Generations



Great Grandmother Ethel H. White, Mother Margaret Torok, Baby Daughter Susanne Torok
Grandmother Mildred White Nicholson



*Quilt square depicting the White Homestead,
quilted in 1976 by
Mildred White Nicholson
for the Bicentennial Quilt of Knox.*

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