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**McKownville: News And Comment**

By FRED B. ABELE

Christmas lights have faded like stars disappearing in the light of dawn and the bright reds and greens have given way to the more

somber tones of winter as we begin the new year of 1985. Already we can notice a distinct gain in daylight in the evening as the sun sets later each day. Sunrise, now at its earliest, 7:25 a.m., will begin to come earlier and we will be on our way to spring.

Last week we could paraphrase that old Christmas poem to read, "Twas the day after Christmas and all through the house, not a creature was stirring as all the ladies were out attending the after Christmas sales." A trip through Stuyvesant Plaza on Dec. 26 revealed the sale shoppers vying with each other to acquire the best wrappings and cards for Christmas 1985. The beautifully decorated trees at Bed, Board and Bath were being picked clean as the ornaments were being sold right off the trees.

Last week had other thrills also. Day after Christmas the 1985 seed catalogs began to arrive, giving us something to look forward to. On the darker side of things, the income tax forms also arrived.

The usual arrangements have been made in town for the disposal of Christmas trees, now totally useless after their brief time of glory. Useless? Well, not entirely. In what has now become a tradition, a chipper will be at the Garden Shoppe on Carman Road on Saturdays, Jan. 5 and 12, for the recycling of trees. The tree may be deposited there at any time. If you bring a plastic bag or two, you can pick up ground-up tree material which is excellent for mulch in the vegetable garden next summer. It holds in the moisture for the plants, necessitating less watering. Your happily growing tomato plants will carry on the memory of Christmas past.

As we reflect on the departing year 1984, we find much unfinished business to which attention should be directed during 1985. Of prime interest should be the Western Ave. bridge over the Thruway. We noted in recent releases by New York State DOT that the traffic pattern to the Crossgates Mall is on target as predicted and no additional road work will be required of the owners. Politics being what they are, this is not surprising.

We had to listen to all the publicity about "Rebuilding New York." We also heard about all the unsafe and deficient bridge structures in the state. We know that many of these are deemed deficient not because of structural shortcomings but because they fail to meet present standards of configuration and construction, including their approaches.

We voters passed a bond issue just back a short spell to correct these deficiencies. Yet shortly after we voted we watched DOT put its blessing on plans for the intersection of Routes 20, Schoolhouse Road and the I-87 extension that turned it into a nightmare and made many other so-called "unsafe bridges" pale into insignificance.

It is time we taxpayers and voters of Guilderland, and our leaders, push to have the situation corrected by at least widening the south side of the Western Ave. bridge to provide an additional eastbound lane and eliminate the unheard-of zigzag pattern through those intersections where lane and pavement markings are invisible in snow and mist. If Crossgates Mall is not required to pay a portion of correcting the mess created for their benefit, then it is high time that DOT institutes a project to perform the work at the expense of all the taxpayers. Let's get it moving before too many fatalities occur. We are aware of the length of time required to design a project and move it to contract (except when big money wants it).

Another abomination to be corrected at the same location is the traffic signal system which frequently requires one stop right after another at Schoolhouse Road, I-87 and Church Road for red signals. They should be synchronized to permit a free flow on Route 20.

Just west of this location we watched the houses along Western Ave. demolished on the east side of the Crossgates entrance. The houses on the west side look for the most part vacant and we can assume demolition will overtake them shortly. One of these on Lehner Road was originally the living quarters for Tollgate No. 1 on the Great Western Turnpike. Located on Western Ave. at Winthrop Ave., it was moved in 1907 to its present location. Constructed about 1849 for the Great Western Plank Road, and now sitting on a 1907 foundation, it probably has little significance in its present location.

We note new rumblings about removing the trailer court just to the east. When all these buildings have been removed, the trees will probably be next and we will have a clear panorama of the parking lots and blank walls that comprise the external view of Crossgates Mall. In this writer's opinion, which does not necessarily reflect the opinion of all, especially those who love paved-over land and unsightly blank walls, it is one of the ugliest centers in the area, and would do well to be hidden from view by the trees and buildings. Furthermore, Western Ave. seems to have become the main entrance in spite of the fact that this was denied at the time of the hearings and presentations. As could have been foretold, promises are soon forgotten.

Still another item of unfinished business in McKownville is the restoration of the McKownville Reservoir, badly silted in during the Crossgates construction. This is another situation where the Department of Environmental Conservation permitted the damage to occur and then has turned

their backs on the damage to the stream and done nothing to order its correction.

When the reservoir was dredged in 1965 to clear it of siltation from previous highway construction, this writer remembers carefully prepared cross-sections of the reservoir by J. Kenneth Fraser Associates, engineering firm. These should be available to show the contours as of that time either at the water department or at Fraser's office. Properly cleaned up and with some landscape, the pond should be an asset to the community. However, those responsible for the damage should pay for the correction thereof.

Another item for the New York State DOT is the replacement of the McKownville sign removed from the eastbound side of Western Ave. during the construction of the new bridge over Western Ave. leading to the I-87 extension. It should be replaced to mark our community. We are proud of who we are and want others to know who we are. As has been said many times before, we have few enough identifying marks to indicate the hamlet which grew up around the inn of William McKown (1763-1843), one of the early supervisors of the town.

We noted after the publicity last fall that the old McKown house at 1245 Western Ave. (c1840 and McKownville's oldest building), was secured against the weather by covering the broken windows with plastic. Recently the chimney has been observed to have partially fallen in. We wonder how far the promises of restoration by its owner will go. It is discouraging to watch McKownville's only significant site go down the drain. Efforts by the Guilderland Historical Society to stimulate interest in restoration of old buildings have been rather discouraging.

The series on "Experiencing Albany," a prelude to the 1986 tricentennial, for which this writer provided an early December program, will continue in January with three programs, all on Sunday afternoons at 3 p.m. and all to be held at the Albany Institute of History and Art, 125 Washington Ave., Albany. They are enumerated in detail in the "Coming Events" column in this paper and discuss the stove industry, once very prominent in Albany; the Hudson River school of artists; and Albany observe on Jan. 6, 13 and 20.

Another program of possible interest to readers will be presented at the Saturday, Jan. 12 meeting of Hudson Valley Chapter, Steamship Historical Society of America, to be held at 8 p.m. at St. Paul's Church hall on Holland Ave., Albany, near Child's Hospital. Dr. Richard Hauser, professor emeritus of biological sciences at SUNYA, will present a slide illustrated talk entitled "Crossing the Andes by Ship." Included will be the steamship crossing of Lake Titicaca (12,500 ft. elev.), as well as scenes of Tierra del Fuego at the southern tip of the Western Hemisphere and Patagonia and travel on the narrow-gauge steam train. Dr. Hauser grew up in Argentina, Chile and Peru and returned to South America after his education to do research. The program should be highly interesting and informative.

The Guilderland Historical Society will begin its 14th year with a January meeting on Thursday the 17th at the Mynderse-Frederick House, Main St., Guilderland Center at 8 p.m. Officers for the coming year will be Mark Hesler, president; George Lemmon, vice president; Kathleen Doran, secretary; and Ruth Abele, treasurer. They will be installed at that meeting. A program will be presented and the public is cordially invited to attend. On the 1985 docket is the restoration of the upstairs room of history which the society will dedicate to Arthur B. Gregg, late town historian, whose historical research has left us a legacy of historical documentation of early times in Guilderland and the Normanskill valley and the land below the "Hellebergh."