

Many thanks to the Venerable Folk for so generously sharing their stories to make this exhibit possible!



This exhibition was produced by Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust and the Tug Hill Commission in cooperation with Loretta Lepkowski. This project creatively captures the history, culture, and vitality of Tug Hill, a key part of the land trust's mission, and was inspired by the Commission's Tug Hill Sages distinction:



Tug Hill Sages were first designated by the Tug Hill Commission in 1983. The distinction is bestowed upon those individuals who have vast knowledge of Tug Hill's heritage and its environment and have shown a life-long involvement in the region.

Additional thanks to:

Interview and Research: *Camilla Ammirati*

Production Assistance: *Traditional Arts of Upstate New York (TAUNY)*

Design: *LaPointe Illustration*

Video production and Editorial Assistance: *Meredith Turk*



Funding was provided by the St. Lawrence Arts Council, NYS Council on the Arts, NYS Tug Hill Commission, Iroquois Gas Community Grant Program, The John Ben Snow Foundation, Inc, and the Northern New York Community Foundation. A portion of this work was made possible through two Public Arts Fellowship Grants.

This project is made possible in part with funds from the Decentralization Program, a regrant program of the New York State Council on the Arts, with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature, and administered by St. Lawrence County Arts Council.



Venerable Folks of Tug Hill Exhibition



Paintings by Loretta Lepkowski

2016—17

- ◆ *October 20, 2016—Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust 25th Anniversary Celebration, Kallet Theater, Pulaski*
- ◆ *Oct-Nov 2016—Halfshire Historical Society, Richland*
- ◆ *November 10, 2016 - Tug Hill Commission Annual Dinner, Tailwater Lodge, Altmar*
- ◆ *February thru April 2017—Traditional Arts of Upstate New York, Canton, NY*

Artist Statement

Loretta Lepkowski was raised on a small dairy farm in southern Lewis County in the Tug Hill region of NYS. This upbringing in a Polish, Catholic family of nine children along with her previous careers in social work and elementary education laid the ground work for appreciation of the “salt of the earth,” resourceful and hard working people of the north country. Loretta and her husband, Peter Ostrum, a large animal veterinarian, settled in the area and raised two children.

Along the way, she developed a passion for art, enrolled in workshops, started painting local narrative stories, and exhibited with the Central NY Watercolor Society, VIEW (Arts Center in Old Forge), North Country Arts Council, Lewis County Community Arts, Dodge Pratt Northam Art & Community Center. This was strengthened with sponsorship of the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust through a Community Arts Grant under the NYS Council of the Arts awarded in 2010. A traveling art show titled, “Celebrating Family Farms of the Tug Hill” was produced that featured paintings and descriptive summaries of a variety of family farms within Lewis and Jefferson Counties. The positive public response to that exhibit traveling over the past 6 years generated the seed for Loretta to paint a new series focusing on portraits.

“Venerable Folks of Tug Hill” began in 2014 as a collaborative project with the artist, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust (THTLT), the Tug Hill Commission and TAUNY (Traditional Arts of Upstate New York). The goal of the overall project was to document personal stories that make up the diverse traditions and culture of residents of Tug Hill. Public Arts Fellowships through the NYS Council of Arts (see credits) was the beginning funding source. Loretta's portraits capture the character of the individuals, some with hints of their story. The portraits emerged from incubating ideas after meeting the subjects, hearing their stories, studying photos, sketching compositions and finally painting with watercolor and pastel. This multimedia collection of portraits, photos, written and oral histories chronicles local Tug Hill history with memorable people. They are what makes Tug Hill special. The artist and the collaborative agencies and sponsors are especially grateful to these folks who opened their doors and welcomed us into their lives, sharing their stories, music, and good humor for this wonderful educational exhibit.

Loretta M. Lepkowski
6065 Duncan Rd., Glenfield, NY 13343
E-mail: retta07@hughes.net



Jim and Arden Burke



GEORGE BIBBINS, SR.

George Bibbins, Sr. and his wife Beverly reside in the rural NW corner of Lewis County in Pinckney where they raised their son, George Jr. (board member of the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust) and daughter, Karen.

They lived on the family farm but realized that they were not meant to be farmers. George learned to be an electrician and, according to his son, rewired nearly 150 dairy barns to accommodate the bulk tanks that store and cool milk. It took ingenuity to rewire many of the older barns. Beverly was a hairdresser and became a lay minister and pastor in Richville and

later Carthage.

George had a big impact on shaping the character of Tug Hill. He served on the Lewis County Steering Council that planned the public forums in 1974-1975 for the Tug Hill Commission. He was a 12 year member of the Cooperative Tug Hill Planning Board and was Supervisor of the Town of Pinckney for many years. He received recognition as a Tug Hill Sage in 1993. The couple have been married since 1946 and dedicated their lives to their family and community. They remarked, “We just enjoy living.” Their hope for the future is that Tug Hill organizations like the Tug Hill Commission remain strong. - Their marriage is certainly strong.



BEN COE

Benjamin “Ben” Coe of Watertown, NY, was the first executive director of the NYS Tug Hill Commission serving in that position for 20 years (1973-93). The Tug Hill Commission’s “grassroots approach” sought input from these rural communities with public forums and supported their unique concerns and voiced needs. Working from the ground up, Ben forged a respect for the people and communities of Tug Hill that still guides the work of the Commission and laid a foundation for creation of Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust.

Ben and his wife Margaret “Peggy” (married over 60 years) have enhanced our region with their many acts of leadership and volunteerism in various community organizations. In May 2013, the Commission honored Ben as a Tug Hill Sage and in the Spring of 2014, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust named one of the trails at its Joseph Blake Wildlife Sanctuary, the “Peggy and Ben Coe Trail,” recognizing Peggy’s key role in donation of the Sanctuary by the North Country Bird Club.

JIM BURKE

Jim Burke resides on the family homestead near Taberg, NY, where he was born in his house to Frances Ninabelle “Nina” and Andrew Burke. Despite only having an 8th grade education, Jim became skilled and worked on construction, did logging and became a self-taught musician.

Throughout his life, Jim had an affinity for music and stories, composing songs that emerged from life on Tug Hill. He is working on a book of a collection of his original songs and family history. Arden, his wife of 57 years, assists with the family history, photographs and has a talent for embossed wood carving and singing.

The musical concert led by Jim and his friend Norman Fey (once comprising the “Tug Hill 2 Band”) for the Sunday service on Sept. 11, 2016, at the Point Rock Methodist Church, received the blessing of Pastor Deb Wollaber. This country church was the inspiration for Jim’s song, “The Little White Church at the Top of the Hill.”



Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust—Linda Garrett, executive director

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust’s mission is to protect the wildlands, working forests and farms of the Tug Hill region and surrounding areas, and to promote appreciation of the region’s natural and cultural heritage, for present and future generations.

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust envisions a Tug Hill region that includes a healthy mix of wild forest lands, healthy working forest lands and farms that support thriving people and communities ecologically, economically and socially.

NYS Tug Hill Commission—Katie Malinowski, executive director

The NYS Tug Hill Commission is a small, non-regulatory state agency charged with “helping local governments and citizens shape the future of the Tug Hill region.” The Tug Hill region includes 41 towns and 19 villages in portions of Jefferson, Lewis, Oneida and Oswego Counties. The uniqueness of the Tug Hill region and its natural resources were recognized by New York State in 1972 when it created the Commission. In 1992, the state legislature passed the Tug Hill Reserve Act, further recognizing the statewide importance of the Region’s natural resources and in 1998 passed legislation encouraging the use of state-held conservation easements on key working forest lands.



Frank Russell, Doc Russell, Janet Thompson (THTLT Board Member), Linda Garrett (THTLT executive director) Loretta Lepkowski (Artist), and John Constable, III in front of the Constable hunting camp.

TERRY AND GEORGE CATALDO



Teresa “Terry” & George Cataldo live along the Independence River and have strong ties with Tug Hill. Terry grew up on a dairy farm on the Zimmer Road on Mohawk Hill. She remembers traveling to the one room school house on NYS Rte 26 in a wooden school bus sleigh, and St. Michael's Catholic Church up the hill on an open milk sleigh in winter.

George was raised in Lyons Falls by his oldest sister after their mother died young. George worked on a farm, joined the armed services and later attended NYS Ranger School at Wanakena. He then worked on various logging and forestry jobs, even traveling out west. He did surveying on Tug Hill. George retired from working for Lewis County in the Real Property Department, where he honed his love for maps. Over the years he has acquired quite a collection, each with a story.

George and Terry are community minded and enjoy family and local history. The couple is often seen at community and church events throughout the

ELAINE YERDON AND DAUGHTER ANGIE KIMBALL



Elaine Yerdon and her husband John are both life-long residents of Redfield, NY. Elaine was the Town Clerk for 30 years and is a current Councilman, and a charter member of the Fire Department's auxiliary. She ran the Oswelegois Club (now the Crossroads) for many years. Elaine and John had 3 children. - Their daughter, Angie Kimball, also a Redfield resident with her

spouse, is a Circuit Rider for the Cooperative Tug Hill Council where she's assigned 16 rural towns, and attends their meetings to assist in local planning, zoning, local laws and serves as liaison to the Tug Hill Commission.

Angie learned the community spirit of giving back and is also an EMT with their Volunteer Fire Company. They share stories of working to rescue people in snowmobile accidents or those falling through the ice on the nearby Salmon River Reservoir.

H. DOUGLAS BARCLAY

H. Douglas “Doug” Barclay, life-long resident of Pulaski, is married to Sara “Dee Dee” Seiter and has five children and grandchildren. He is the seventh generation at the Barclay estate where it was farmed since 1807. Doug is a graduate of Yale University and Syracuse College of Law. He is a prominent banking and administrative law attorney. Presently, he is a partner and serves as Counsel to Barclay Damon, LLP, a 275-attorney law firm with offices across the northeast.

Doug has been involved with many local and national organizations. Most notably, he served as a New York State Senator (1965-1984), and on various committees and sponsored major legislation in housing, criminal justice, court reform and economic development. Doug is proud to have served as Ambassador to the Republic of El Salvador (2003-2007), receiving the award of the Noble Amigo de El Salvador in 2006.

Along with his international service, Doug has a long history of supporting his home town and the North Country from the dedication in 1985 of the H. Douglas Barclay Courthouse in Pulaski to continued support of community traditions such as the Oswego County Fair. He was an integral part of forming the Tug Hill Commission. He is also involved with the family's Douglaston Salmon Run business in Pulaski, NY.



Terry Cataldo, George Cataldo and Doc Russell.

ARSA AND HOWARD WEIMAN

Arsa and Howard Weiman grew up in a family of 3 brothers on Tug Hill above High-market on a family farm where they had dairy cows and their mother raised chickens. Arsa and Howard remember snow-shoeing with their father to the one room school house, and later riding the canvas school bus sleigh down the hill



to meet the regular school bus. They recall great adventures on Tug Hill with its snowstorms, the wooden snow-roller they helped their father build, digging out the snowplow and the first horse-less vehicle.

They farmed, logged and hiked Tug Hill while enjoying hunting and fishing. Howard died on 12/17/16 at age 97, living a full life where he helped build logging roads in the Adirondacks for Gould Paper Company in Lyons Falls. Arsa is a WW II veteran who was stationed in Greenland. His wife Judy (now deceased) was raised in Minnesota and adjusted well to life on a farm raising four children. They later moved from the farm to the oldest house in Constableville when Arsa worked in the Post Office. As are many Venerable Tug Hillers, Arsa is made of hardy stock and still enjoys living in his house, taking care of its upkeep, large yard and annual supply of firewood. Three of his children have camps on Tug Hill where they all enjoy the outdoors in all seasons.

The original family farm land was bought back into the family and is protected with Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust, thanks to the love of the land that Arsa instilled in his son Al.



Arsa Weiman



John, Elaine Yerdon, Kasey, Angie Kimball

LEONA CHERESHNOSKI

Leona Chereshnoski is the town librarian in Osceola, NY. For the majority of married life with her husband Ray Chereshnoski (1940-2009) she lived in Lorraine. Now she spends much of her time in Osceola, both for the library and for managing her family's Bed & Breakfast business. **Old Lard's Barn Bed & Breakfast is operated out of her childhood home and has been in her family for four generations.**



In Lorraine, where she remains a legal resident, both Leona and her husband Ray were active in community affairs. Ray served as Town Justice, Town Board and Highway Superintendent. He was an avid outdoorsman who enjoyed hunting, fishing and had his own logging business. He became a Tug Hill Sage in 2006.

Leona's mother was Alice Clemens, a champion fiddler who co-founded the New York State Old Tyme Fiddlers' Association and the North American Fiddler's Hall of Fame & Museum in Osceola. Leona has been a member of the Tug Hill Commission since 1984. She loves hosting family reunions at the **family homestead in Osceola and supporting the fiddlers' activities at the nearby Fiddler's Museum.**

EDWIN "DOC" RUSSELL

Dr. Edwin "Doc" Russell followed his father's footsteps in becoming a family doctor in Rome, NY. He made home visits like his father and also had clinic appointments in his home office. Doc and his family are active seasonal residents and advocates for the Tug Hill region. Doc Russell is a long time member (like his father) of the Fish Creek Club and an avid outdoorsman. He enjoys viewing maps and remembers a meeting where the roads were being named in remote areas of Tug Hill. His sons, David and Frank remember hunting, fishing and snowmobiling at the Fish Creek Club with their father and friends. Doc and his sons continue to enjoy visiting friends from Tug Hill and exploring the region. Doc was an integral part of the East Branch of Fish Creek working group which helped protect the then 45,000 acre Lyons Falls Pulp and Paper lands, keeping them undeveloped and securing many of the existing hunt camps. Much of these lands are open to the public at various times of the year and available for traditional recreational uses like hunting, trapping and fishing. Doc Russell was deservedly selected to be a Tug Hill Sage in 1998.



JOHN CONSTABLE, JR.

John P. Constable, Jr., was a member of the eight ad hoc “steering councils” to plan the public Tug Hill Forums in 1974-75 during the inception of the Tug Hill Commission. John was the fifth generation of the Constable family that lived at Constable Hall.

The family history dates back seven generations to Dr. John Constable, an army doctor who arrived from Dublin to serve the British Majesty during the late French and Indian Wars. His son William was one of the three NYC capitalists who negotiated the Macomb Purchase that comprised nearly a tenth of the land of NYS. William, as principal owner and chief developer, opened up the North Country for settlement. His son, William Jr., built Constable Hall during 1811-1819. The builder's son John, then his son Casimir in 1887, followed by his nephew, John Pierpont Constable, in 1923, inherited the estate. John P. Constable, Jr., became the last Constable family owner at age 21 in 1936. The postwar maintenance costs forced John to sell the estate in 1947, declining commercial offers. John felt it was important to preserve the mansion for its significant history. John would be pleased that the Constable Hall Association and his children support efforts to preserve Constable Hall.



George Cataldo and Bob Sauer

BENJAMIN AND STANLEY SZALACH

Benjamin “Benny” Szalach and his younger brother Stanley grew up on the Morgan Gulf Rd. near Houseville, NY. - Their parents emigrated from Poland and walked from New York City to the farm on Tug Hill. They raised 8 children without electricity on the 20 cow dairy farm along with vegetable gardens, chickens, turkey, ducks and pigs. It was hard winters and long days of work but they all pitched in. The children walked the nearly 2 miles to the one room school house in Houseville where they attended up to 6th grade and then completed their education at General Martin School in Glenfield. The family continues to be devoted to St. Hedwig's Catholic Church, where many of the parishioners are Polish. Their mother was a resourceful cook and baker. Their father was a dynamite expert and helped build the Softmaple/ Stillwater Dam. Benny went on to work at the Gould Paper Mill in Lyons Falls for 40 years. Stanley settled into dairy farming in Houseville after the army and raised 5 children with his wife Benny. Now after 50 years of marriage they have 12 grandchildren. The Szalach family loves to get together, hunt deer on the hill, and tell stories of their Tug Hill upbringing and adventures. The barn is gone now with the old house barely standing, but the memories remain.



Marian and John Constable and daughter Jane Rockwell.



ROBERT SAUER

Robert “Bob” Sauer is a graduate of the NYS Ranger School at Wanakena, as well as the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, in Syracuse. Bob worked for over 32 years as a forester, log buyer and scaler for Harden Furniture Company in McConnellsville. Bob continues his passion for the woods in retirement as a consulting forester. Bob is a former trustee and mayor of the Village of Camden, founding member of Tug Hill Resources Investment for Tomorrow (THRIFT), former board member of the Tug Hill Tomorrow

Land Trust and serves as a director on the Northern Oneida County Council of Governments. Bob was recognized as a Tug Hill Sage in 2003. Bob was also the Grand Marshall of the NYS Woodsmen's Field Days in Boonville in 2011. He and his wife Mary, a retired school teacher raised in Florence, NY, enjoy their family's connections with Tug Hill, its interesting people, land and its folklore.

FRANCIS YERDON

Francis “Fran” Yerdon was actively involved in the effort to introduce land use planning in the original “nine towns” in the heart of Tug Hill in the early 1970's. He was the first chairman of the Tug Hill Cooperative Board developed by the Tug Hill Commission. Fran is an active deer and coyote hunter, trapper, fisherman and loves snowmobiling. He is the oldest of nine children and the only one born in a hospital. Fran has been on his own since age 10 when he worked for Judge Fox in the summer and later for a farmer for 6 years earning room & board and \$3 per week. He grew up in North Redfield and lived off the land; hanging the deer with the hide against a tree in winter for refrigeration, and using a gravity fed water ram that supplied the house and farm. Fran worked as labor foreman on repairing the Salmon River Reservoir dam with his brother John working as the concrete foreman. Both Fran and Carol strive to give back to their community of Osceola and rural Tug Hill. Fran was Town Supervisor, on the Vol. Fire Department, and involved with the Fish & Game Club. Carol works as an EMT with Search & Rescue and is proud to say she worked her way from basic first aid to becoming an EMT. She was the first woman in the State to be on the Fire Department. Fran became a Tug Hill Sage in 2012.



WARREN MATHIS

Warren Mathis is a large land owner in the core of Tug Hill where his favorite trees are the rare old growth birch and cherry. He served for many years on Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust and the NYS Forest Practice Board and sold Stihl chainsaws. Warren epitomizes the spirit of the Venerable Tug Hill folk. He grew up in a large family in rural West Leyden where every day life was hard work, growing up before there was electricity. Life on the family farm included milking cows, harvesting potatoes, maple sugaring and fishing, hunting and logging with his father and brothers. The family played baseball and basketball (in the haymow), and attended dances in their limited free time.

Warren and his wife Eleanor have been married since 1957, after he impressed her with his 1955 Chevy.

They are proud of their son and his wife and grandchildren. Warren became a Tug Hill Sage in 2003. A highlight for Warren was being the Grand Marshall of the NYS Woodsmen's Field Days in Boonville in 2010. Warren loves sharing his stories about his family, logging and adventures on Tug Hill.



ROBERT McNAMARA

Robert “Bob” McNamara from Cleveland, NY, is a graduate of SUNY ESF, a wildlife artist, graphic designer, and illustrator as well as a dedicated naturalist extremely knowledgeable about the ecology of Tug Hill. Bob has designed and illustrated works published in various nature magazines and books about the environment including, [Tug Hill- A Four Season Guide to the Natural Side](#). He has created and illustrated environmental interpretive exhibits throughout the region and Adirondacks. His artwork can be seen at www.artofwilderness.com.

Bob is passionate about sharing his knowledge of nature and Tug Hill, promoting environmental awareness and the need for protection of natural habitats for the diversity of species. Currently, he is championing the development of a long-distance (20 miles) hiking trail across the core of Tug Hill. Bob and his wife Carolyn raised two children and built their own house with native logs, lumber and stones. Bob was recognized in 2015 as a Tug Hill Sage.



GEORGE WILLIAM CAPRON

George Capron has been called a North Country institution, the voice of WBRV – The Moose radio station in Boonville since 1961, when at age 19, he passed a Federal Communications test. This ended his career as a milk delivery man. George is famous for entertaining his listeners with little “Tidbits” of information found in the Boonville Herald about life on Tug Hill. There is hardly a person in the Boonville area who hasn't had his or her birthday or anniversary announced by George.

His family roots are from Tug Hill. His grandmother was born in Montague. His grandfather, George's namesake, who lived in Boonville was a legend. Not only did he work as a bricklayer, played the fiddle at dances, but was the sharp shooter for the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show. He also built a reputation making quality wooden snowshoes during the winters. Standing by his “wall of fame” at the WBRV Station, George is proud but humble about all the honors he's received over the years, from broadcasting for the Oneida and Lewis County Fairs, to the Woodsmen's Field Days Parades, to the Lost Trail Snowmobile Club, to the Elks, and finally becoming a Tug Hill Sage in 2015.



IRVINE “DUTCH” BUCHAL

Irvine “Dutch” Buchal of Copenhagen, NY, is probably best known for his association with the Fly Wheels & Pulleys Club in Constableville, and the NYS Old Tyme Fiddlers' Association in Osceola. His pride and joy is showing off his Linn Tractor and steam engines and being curator of the Deer River Museum.

Dutch operates a dairy farm with his son Frank, and like many Tug Hill farmers supplements his income as a logger, maple sugar producer and saw mill operator. He and his son share a passion for old machines and

tools as well as the history of logging in NYS. Dutch is full of stories of his adventures on Tug Hill working in the woods.

He and his wife Helen raised two children on their farm. Dutch was recognized as a Tug Hill Sage in 2012. He also served as Trustee of St. Peter and St. Paul's Church in New Boston.

MARTHA DEMING



Martha Deming was raised in the Adirondack High Peak area and transplanted herself within the Tug Hill region. She was an art teacher in the middle school grades for Holland Patent School for 32 years. Martha firmly rooted herself on her 140 acres in Remsen, NY, with her horses, dogs and cats while establishing herself as an award winning, professional artist.

Martha served on the planning board for the Town of Remsen for 5 years in the 1990's and was on the Remsen Barn Festival Committee for 10 years. Martha has been a strong supporter of farmland preservation and placed her land in an easement with Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust in 2013. She also initiated and participated as an artist in the Paint Out events to benefit the Land Trust. This portrait was completed after Loretta Lepkowski traveled as Martha's assistant for her week-long workshop and demonstration for the Transparent Watercolor Society of America (TWSA) held in Kenosha, Wisconsin in June 2015. Martha was also the Juror of Selection for this prestigious TWSA's Exhibition. Martha's art work can be seen at www.marthademing.com.



Martha Deming in her studio.