

## Greece History

### Proposed Community Center and Park

by **Bill Sauers**

In June of 1929, our town of only 13,000 was growing rapidly and there were no provisions for playgrounds or recreation. Then **W. Chandler Knapp**, chairman of the Greece Planning Board, with the backing of leading residents, proposed purchasing 85 acres of land, known as Glendemere Farms, on Dewey Avenue. The land, to be used as a community center and park, was ideally suited for such a purpose, with a large barn that could be used as a community center and gym, and a building that would serve as a library, and enough land that could provide excellent facilities for bridle paths and a playground. The owner had, over the past 19 years, actually developed his farm as a future park and, at age 69, was ready to sell. He had already donated some of his property to the local fire department the year before. The town council was not ready to commit to such a large endeavor at that time but would take the question up with the Monroe County Parks Commission, relative to their buying the property."

In the civic planning process timing can be crucial and the summer of 1929 was definitely the wrong time. The County was in the process of acquiring land for Churchville, Mendon Ponds and Ellison Parks, and by the time anyone gave the Greece project any consideration it was the beginning of the Great Depression. The thought of purchasing more land was the last thing on anyone's mind.

The particular parcel of land that the Greece Planning Board was interested in was owned by **George H. Clark**, one of the most well known and wealthiest individuals in Monroe County at the time. At the age of 24, he and his father purchased stock in the Eastman Dry Plate & Film Company, thereby becoming one of the original investors in what would become the Eastman Kodak Company.

Eight years after the Greece project died, the Catholic Diocese of Rochester, negotiated the purchase of the farm from Mr. Clark for \$25,000, forever ending any possibility of a town park and community center at that site. Although now in private hands, and developed for other purposes, the land would be used by neighborhood youth for quite some time. Ball diamonds had been laid out by its new owner, and they were open most of the time for pick-up games, the large field was excellent for Fall football and an adjacent gully made for some of the best, although very dangerous, winter sledding in the area. For many years, long before environmental and safety rules, it was also the site of an annual community Christmas tree burning.

Most people in Greece have long forgotten the name George H. Clark, but his legacy lives on. In 1928 the Barnard Fire Department built their firehouse on the land he donated. That original firehouse still stands today, albeit with a few additions. In June of 1942 several children and nuns took a bus from the City and moved into their new home, named St. Joseph's Villa. (now the Villa of Hope) That barn, the one George built years ago, still stands today, although the building that could have been the library is long gone due to the reconstruction and re-alignment of Dewey Avenue.

It took 77 years from that proposed community center and park at George Clark's Glendemere Farms to the opening, in 2006, of our Greece Community and Senior Center on the Greece Town Campus. So what would we have called that community center and park in 1929? I'm sure no one will ever know, but in 1949 when Supervisor Gordon Howe announced the name of a new street connecting Dewey Avenue and Almay Road, a street that was on the land once owned by George Clark, the land that may have been our town community center and park, did he realize the irony in the street's name, CLARK PARK?

This building might have become our Town's community center.

*This a condensed version of a story originally published in the Greece Post in 2006*

