

## Meet My Great Grandpa Arthur

by

Barbara M. Randall

My mom's side of the family never shared or discussed family history. No Bible full of births, marriages and deaths. No stories of ancestors passed around the dinner table or shared at holidays. My great grandfather Arthur died before my mom was out of high school. My grandfather, Enric, left about the same year his father died and disappeared from our family. My mom and my grandmother never talked about them. All I knew from my mom about Great Grandpa Arthur was that he "drank too much" and "lost" the farm.

At least the newspaper shared stories and glimpses into his life! Great Grandpa Arthur was often in the paper and, because he was such an integral part of my hometown's development and had such an impact on people, I have now gotten to know him.

The REAL History...

Much of what my mom and I have learned about Great Grandpa Arthur came from his obituary. My mother was in the tenth grade when she came home from school one April day and discovered Great Grandpa Arthur dead on the floor. She called neighbors to help and they called her mother home from work. It was left to my grandmother to make arrangements for her father-in-law. He was 70 yrs. old when he died in 1937. In his 70 years Great Grandpa Arthur helped to build and develop my hometown of Marcellus, New York.

Marcellus, established in 1794, grew out of a military land tract from the Revolutionary War. Over time the area gave birth to several towns- six to be exact. Prior to the opening of the Erie Canal Marcellus lay on a major migration route across New York state.

Thomas Hackford emigrated from England and married Mary Melvina Smalley in northern New York state. They likely passed through Marcellus on their way to Michigan in 1860 before returning to settle. Unfortunately, there are no family stories or documents to prove that. By the time their son, Arthur, was born in 1867 they had settled on a farm in Marcellus on lot 42.

During the late 1800's and early 1900's the village of Marcellus struggled to modernize and grow. Marcellus evolved from a stopover point on the migration trail to a destination offering farmland and factories for families. Thomas also did his share to build Marcellus. He was one of two Englishmen who helped to build the village streets (with the rest of the labor provided by immigrant Irish). He was also a sexton in the village cemetery and provided stone for road building from his gravel bed. Thomas was one of the 67 volunteers

to the Civil War in 1863 to fill Marcellus' quota. Apparently, giving to the community was a value that Thomas and Mary instilled in their children. Arthur and his sisters Anna and Belle were all active in the development and life of the village of Marcellus.

#### Service with a Smile and a Lecture...

Most of his life was spent in Marcellus, although for several years Great Grandpa Arthur lived a few miles away in Navarino. Arthur was a prominent and popular citizen. He was a village Constable and Deputy Sheriff for over 18 years in both Marcellus and Navarino. Many young people in trouble found themselves apprehended and lectured by Great Grandpa Arthur. When brought before the judge they might be surprised to find their fines paid by him. Frequent articles in the village newspaper, The Marcellus Observer, or the Syracuse papers reported on his investigations of criminal activity or search for a missing person.

An investigation report said that Great Grandpa Arthur had gone to a farm where a suspect was thought to have gone. He reported that they were not there. End of report. It was the same for a missing person, although he would promise to keep an eye out for them. One report concerned two brothers fighting over a potato field that he took right to the grand jury. Law enforcement has changed over the last 80+ years!

Newspaper accounts also noted the many elections Great Grandpa won as Constable and his political appearances at public functions. His attendance at the Six Town Picnic (quite the social event of the year) that celebrated the towns belonging to the original Marcellus land tract was often part of the event advertising.

#### Here a Business, There a Business...

Great Grandpa Arthur did so much more during his 70 years. He must have been quite the man on the go- what we'd call a "multi-tasker" today. He held several events at Hackford Hall near Marcellus. Oyster dinners seemed to be popular. He owned the Marietta Hotel for a time. He bought buildings and then decided what to do with them. In 1926 as the automobile was becoming more prevalent, there was a Standard Oil Company petition before the Village Board to put a filling station on his property.

#### Gentleman Farmer...

Great Grandpa Arthur's farm was on lot 24 in Marcellus. Nine Mile Creek ran through the middle of his property. It provided a favorite fishing and swimming hole for the young people of the village for many years. Girls and boys each had their favorite swimming holes. Many current Marcellus senior citizens have fond memories of playing or fishing on his farm. My mom was one of them. His farm remained open for the young people until the

vandalism became too troublesome and his cattle were stampeded. He closed off access in 1931. Maybe, at 64, he no longer had the energy for continual repairs.

Great Grandpa Arthur raised award winning Hampshire sheep and bulls on his farm. In late August he was a fixture at the New York State Fair. He was listed as a member of the American Hampshire Sheep Association in the 1920 records. The record also listed the sales and purchases of ewes and rams.

In 1935 the thirty acre farm was sold to Onondaga County for \$2500 to become Marcellus Park. Years before others had suggested that the farm was the perfect place for a park in Marcellus. Today the park belongs to Marcellus. Although you can't swim in the creek today, it is still a great place to go for a picnic. I remember going to Little League games and to the wading pool and swings as a child to play. I didn't know then that it was part of my family heritage. For over 70 years it has been a place of enjoyment for many.

Master Builder and Fixer...

Great Grandpa Arthur brought much more to Marcellus. He was a contractor, carpenter- a master builder. As streets opened in the village, he built many of the houses. For a time there was an area of town called Hackford Tract. South Street, Park Street and Chrysler Street were developed by Great Grandpa Arthur and his son, Enric (my grandfather). Great Grandpa Arthur specialized in barns and did much work around southern Onondaga County.

Great Grandpa Arthur could solve problems that stumped others. He was the 'go to' guy when no one else could figure out solutions. Once, a barn was blown off of its foundation. Other contractors said they could fix it for \$1,000 and noted what a major problem it was. That was quite a bit of money at the time. Great Grandpa Arthur took a few men into the woods, cut some poles and braced the barn back on its foundation. He had the job done in just a few hours. If you had a building problem, Great Grandpa Arthur had a solution!

His talents extended beyond building houses and barns. Today a flagpole stands at the point in front of the Methodist Church in the center of the village. Great Grandpa Arthur put it there. A huge boulder was chosen in Stone's Woods to be a soldiers' memorial. No one could figure out how to transport the boulder. Two Syracuse firms tried and gave up. Six tried to move the great stone and gave up. They couldn't do it. Great Grandpa Arthur could. The stone monument sits in the front of the flagpole, the destination of the annual Memorial Day parade. He did it for Marcellus and he did it for the town of Onondaga Hill when engineers couldn't figure out how to do it there. He was even called in to help when the Marcellus town snow plow was stuck in snow and no one could free it. As the newspaper article said, "when all else fails, call Arthur!"

Great Grandpa Arthur was known as a “real carpenter”. In later years other carpenters were compared to him. He was the standard. He did take some teasing from people in the village for his building priorities. When he moved back to Marcellus from Navarino he built the barn before the house. There was speculation that he forced his wife to live in the barn, so to save face, he had to get the house done. I’m not sure how much fact there was to that!

Great Grandpa Arthur’s Legacy...

A walk around the village of Marcellus today demonstrates Great Grandpa Arthur’s commitment to the community of Marcellus, his building skill, his ingenuity. No longer is his name on any part of the community. But he is still remembered. His April 22, 1937 obituary covered much of the front page of *The Marcellus Observer*- spread over three columns. It expressed respect and genuine affection. He was mentioned on the one year anniversary of his death and again in *Memories of Marcellus* as late as 2003.

I like to think some of Great Grandpa Arthur has been handed down to me. I never had a chance to know him. Great Grandpa did so much for people without publicity, acclaim or boasting that my mother knew very little of him. My discoveries have surprised my mother.

Great Grandpa Arthur had a talent for solving problems with simple but effective solutions. In a way he left his mark on history without becoming history himself. My mother probably remembered his faults but I choose to remember his accomplishments and, because of Great Grandpa Arthur, I have gained a deeper understanding and appreciation of my hometown.

#### Bibliography

“Arthur A. Hackford, Well Known Builder, Dies Suddenly At Home.” *Marcellus Observer*, April 22, 1937, 1. [www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com).

Assistant Secretary, compiler. *Flock Record of Hampshire Down Sheep 1920*. Vol. XVIII. Detroit: The American Hampshire Sheep Association, 1921. xxxviii, 324.

“Brothers Wage Battle Over a Potato Field.” *Post Standard* (Syracuse), October 4, 1921. [www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com).

“Children Stampede Hackford’s Cattle”, “Notice.” *Marcellus Observer*, July 1, 1931, 1. [www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com).

Curtin, John P. *Pucker Street The First 100 Years*. Marcellus, NY: Marcellus Historical Society, 2003. 186, 194, 210, 224, 344.

Domurat, Mary Jane. "Marcellus Memories." *Marcellus Observer*, October 3, 2001, 4. [www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com).

Domurat, Mary Jane. "Marcellus Memories." *Marcellus Observer*, April 24, 2002, 4. [www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com).

Domurat, Mary Jane. "Marcellus Memories." *Marcellus Observer*, August 6, 2003, 4. [www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com).

Fairman, Roy E. "Spaulding Named For Supervisor." *Syracuse Herald*, September 23, 1929. [www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com).

Griffing, Frank. "Memories of Marcellus." *Marcellus Observer*, September 14, 1961, 2. [www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com).

"Home News." *Marcellus Observer*, September 1919 (?). [www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com).

"Presto Change! "Art" Moves Town Plow." *Marcellus Observer*, February 11, 1931, 1. [www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com).

"Sheep Breeders Ask New Building." *Syracuse Journal*, September 14, 1920, 11. [www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com).

Spinks, Vaughn. "Letters." *Marcellus Observer/Skaneateles Press*, 1995. [www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com).

"State Road." *Marcellus Observer*, 1912 (?). [www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com).

"The Office Window." *Marcellus Observer*, October 1, 1930, 1. [www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com).

"What Year Was Monument Moved?" *Marcellus Observer*, January 11, 1946, 1. [www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com).