**Bedford Famers Club**

**May 22, 2019 Meeting Minutes**

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m. at the Caramoor Center for the Arts.

In the absence of the secretaries, Mary Farley read the minutes from the April meeting. They were unanimously approved.

Jim Wood, in the absence of treasurer Roger Vincent, presented the financial report – we are solvent – and passed around the sign in sheet with the envelope for dues attached.

Jim Wood presented the slate of officers for 2019 on behalf of the nominating committee:

President Mary Farley

President Emeritus Jim Wood

Vice President Robin Ashley

Treasurer Roger Vincent

Secretary Elin Sullivan

Assistant Secretary Sheila Crespi

Hospitality Julie Henken

Signs and Hospitality Gene and Sylvia Finger

The slate was approved and elected.

John Stockbridge presented the historians report. Hi reviewed the meetings that took place at Aratoma Farm, the previous name of Caramoor. Flora McDonald married a gentleman named William Chandler Casey in 1886, and they acquired 185 acres here on Girdle Ridge Road to establish Aratoma Farm. In 1905, William Casey died, and four years later Flora married Frank Hunter Potter. Aratoma would become nationally known as a premier chicken farm. It was at this farm that the Farmer’s Club would make annual visits.
The Potters would stay at Aratoma until 1918 when they would sell the remaining sixty acres of their property, complete with ‘an Italian stucco home, sunken gardens, gardener’s cottage and outbuildings’ to Carrie Moore Bain Hoyt and her husband Charles. Unfortunately, five years later Carrie Hoyt died. In 1928, her husband Charles would sell the property, which now was an estate inclusive of lavish gardens, to his friend and business partner Walter Rosen. Walter and his wife Lucie Bigelow Rosen retained the name the Hoyts had given their home -- Caramoor – a contraction of Caroline Moore.

At our February 9th meeting in 1898, William Casey owner of Aratoma Farm spoke of the importance of poultry production to the national economy. He offered some statistics that in 1890 the number of chickens reported nationally was 258 million. He said “If we assume that each hen is worth 30 cents, which we think is a conservative estimate, we shall have $105 million as the value of our hens. If we value egg production at 12 cents per dozen, we estimate at $165 million, and poultry sold as meat $125 million more....we bring the total value of our hen’s product to be $395 million. In 1895, (he said) all the gold, silver, copper, iron and all other minerals mined amounted to $209 million...so we see that our vast mineral resources do not in any degree approach the earning capacity of the hen.”

The September meetings of the Club were regularly held at Aratoma, and the Notes always expressed the favorable response to this location...at the 1912 meeting it was expressed that “if put to a vote it would be a unanimous desire that the September meeting should always be held at Aratoma. It is the meeting to which the ladies are invited, and the members show the best products of their gardens.”

Two years later, in 1914, the September meeting was again held at Aratoma, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Hunter Potter...”the capacious music room for the meeting, the most perfect sod to walk on, and the sunken garden, full of bloom to look at was a delight.”

Once again, the following year at Aratoma, the ladies were invited, and it was recorded they were “present in force.” The September meeting was also the meeting when members exhibit the result of their work during the season. “Aratoma Farm made a handsome exhibit of grapes, tomatoes, carrots, onions, green and yellow peppers. (Presumably chickens were approving in the background).
The Williams Homestead, proverbial for good crops of all kinds showed three varieties of field corn, eggplant and peppers. Mr. James Wood had some handsome apples that he wished named, but no one present was qualified.”

“He also exhibited a novelty, a French watermelon, called a single portion, one half of it being considered what one person would eat. It is a small handsome melon that is desirable for family use.”

Next, Pam Sorkin presented the Timely Tips. She added to the April presentation on the perfect gardening bucket. People commented that it could be improved by providing a seat. So, voilà, a cover for the bucket along with a round cushion creates a seat. Her new favorite tool in her bucket: a SUPER DUPER STRONG SERRATED KNIFE known as a “Jab Saw”. She uses the jab saw when transplanting and dividing, and when planting new plants fresh from the nursery. Always try to divide newly purchased plants when you can. Pay for one; get two.

The plant she discussed is the red bud, recommended by her former teaching colleague, Nancy Sterbenz. It is a member of the Fabceae - “FAH**BAY**CEE” (Pea & Bean) - Family. Its flowers are a dead giveaway. They look very much like sweet pea blooms. The dainty flowers can form directly off the bark of branches and the trunk - not on any long stems or petioles. They are a gorgeous magenta/lavender color. They give rise to clusters of dark bean-like pods that remain on the tree into winter. The leaves are a lovely, waxy, heart shape, that change to a bright yellow in the autumn.

The trunk of the Redbud commonly divides close to the ground creating that gnarly, twisted look of old crab apple trees while still producing a rounded crown. It grows to be about 20-30 feet high and about the same width. Because of this modest size redbuds work well as understory trees, and provide an attractive canopy for spring bulbs.

The group moved to the Rosen House for a tour. Beginning the Music Room, we heard an introduction to the house given by a docent who explained who Walter and Lucie Rosen were and how they came to Katonah. The Club was split into 2 groups to tour the House. Walter and Lucie Rosen acquired the property in 1928 from Walter’s law partner’s mother. They renovated their farm complex into this residence after abandoning their plans to build an Italianate palazzo on the site after the stock market crash of 1929.

 Moving the large greenhouse portion to another location, they built the Music Room where concerts have long been held. Stables were converted to period bedrooms. Begun in 1929, the conversion to the residence was completed in 1938 and is filled with art and decorative arts Walter Rosen purchased from all over the world. He was particularly fond of Asian art of jade and coral, as well as Renaissance art, but he had a very ecletic taste, which is evident in the house.

Their son, Walter, Jr., was shot down in 1944 while flying missions for the Royal Canadian Air Force. In 1946, in his memory, Walter and Lucie established a foundation for a public music festival which has grown into the Caramoor Center for the Arts that we know today. The properties were gifted to the foundation but the Center is supported by donors and ticket sales.

Leaving the house, we were met by Caramoor’s C.E.O, Jeffrey Haydon, who led us on a tour of the grounds on a beautiful spring day. He pointed out additions (bathrooms and tents) and deletions (dance pavilion and tennis court) since the Rosens’ time. He described the plans to renovate the grounds to enhance entrances and gathering points. The Venetian Theater, the largest concert venue, was created by Lucie to commemorate Walter after his death in 1951.

The oldest garden on the site is the “sunken garden,” created in 1911 by Mrs. Potter, an earlier owner. The garden was completely renovated this past year, with the help of the Bedford Garden Club, because the boxwoods and the soil had become infected with a blight. Removing the ivy revealed that it was the only thing holding up the walls, so they had to go, too. We were the first public group to see the newly-completed garden, which is closer to the original plan than the previous version.

Just beyond the sunken garden lie the remnants of the foundation of the original house. It was torn down by the Rosens because it had been vacant for five years and in very bad condition. Their Italianate estate house was to have been on that site.

Mr. Haydon joined us for refreshments and we shared our impressions with him. Many of us had never been to Rosen House or knew of the history of Caramoor so the day was very edifying. Our historian pointed out that the Rosens, as well as the two previous owners – the Potters and Hoyts – are all buried down the street at St. Matthew’s. All agreed it was a wonderful meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Farley

Secretary pro tem