

DEAR

Thanks for the

When Saratoga Living first contacted Nancy Reynolds Rooney at her Spa City residence, it was with the hope of securing some anecdotes about her famous brother Andrew and a few footnotes about their family's ties to our readership area.

Theirs were truly lives well lived and well worth remembering. It is an honor and a privilege to share their legacies with you in this special keepsake edition.

During meetings with Saratoga Living Editor Ann Hauprich, Editorial Associate Audrey Bopp Hauprich and Ballston Spa history buff Chris Morley, Nancy proved to be a source of abundant inspiration — as well as information!

Her vivid memories of people and places now long gone proved priceless.

So detailed were Nancy's descriptions of many buildings that once stood in and around the village that we could actually "color" old black and white photos of them with our imaginations!

Above all, Nancy Reynolds Rooney deepened our appreciation both for the village's history and the role her ancestors played in its past.

We cannot thank Nancy enough for sharing not only her personal insights, but her own special brand of wit and wisdom, as well!



Nancy Reynolds Rooney models a chapeau she purchased in the late 1940s, a kimono her father brought back from Japan when she was a teen and a mink muff that belonged to her grandmother. Little Nancy struck the ladylike pose (opposite) while seated outside 23 Church Avenue in Ballston Spa.



NANCY

colorful memories!

It soon became clear, however, that this was to be no mere fact-finding mission, but rather the start of a treasure hunt that would unearth gems of local history in which Nancy and Andy Rooney's grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles played significant roles.



Born in New York City in 1913, Nancy Reynolds Rooney moved to Albany with her parents, Ellinor and Walter Rooney, when she was a pre-schooler.

At age six, Nancy was introduced to a newborn brother whom she has always called Andrew. Only those who don't know the famed writer and *60 Minutes* commentator use the informal Andy, she insists.

While Andrew was busy "doing the things little brothers usually do" throughout their childhood years, Nancy attended the Albany Academy for Girls. Although admitting that in her youth, she'd "rather do anything but study," Nancy has the utmost respect for the private school and the instructors who worked so hard to try to help her realize her potential there.

What she enjoyed far more than hitting the books was playing field hockey and competing in running games.

Role models for sports abounded: her mother was the girls high jump champion in Ballston Spa and her father played on the local high school football team. Uncle Bill set a record when he ran a race in Madison Square Garden around the turn-of-the-century. Then a Williams College student, Uncle Bill completed the 60-yard dash in record time. After finishing college and law school, Uncle Bill coached the Ballston Spa High School football team. Her brother Andrew was also regarded as a pretty good wrestler during his Albany Academy days.

Following her graduation from the Albany Academy for Girls in 1932, Nancy tackled secretarial studies at Catherine Gibbs in Boston and subsequently went to work in New York City and in Albany.

While at Mead Pulp Sales Inc., she handled myriad tasks. Her main responsibilities involved using the telephone to sell secondary fiber to mills. This was a subject about which she had acquired much knowledge through osmosis.

According to a census, Grandfather Charles P. Rooney worked at Grier's Mill in the 1890s when he was a boarder at the then bustling Medbery Hotel on Front Street. He later landed a management position with The National Mill and moved to a private residence in the village.

At the time of his 1911 marriage, Walter Scott Rooney's occupation was listed as an associate with the firm of Reigel Brothers, wholesale paper dealers. In 1917 he joined the Albany Felt Company where he worked until his retirement.

It troubles Nancy, who first started observing the people and places that made Ballston Spa tick when she came to stay with relatives here during the influenza epidemic of 1918, that many of those who did so much to enrich the community in years gone by have all but been forgotten by the average citizen.

Among those she feels has been "shortchanged" is George West, whose thriving Union Paper Mill occupied the sprawling brick landmark with the distinctive tower on Prospect Street long before it was converted into Bischoff's Chocolate Factory.

Established by George West in 1860, the Union Paper Mill continued to operate, largely powered by the mighty Kaydrosseros Creek, until 1898 at which time the business was sold to the Union Bag and Paper Company, then the largest corporation of its kind in America. It wasn't until 1919 that Frederick Bischoff began making his world-famous candy there and that the building ceased functioning as a chocolate factory in 1942.

Nancy wishes people would associate George West's name with the historic landmark and also wishes the West's "absolutely magnificent mansion" that once adorned the property at the corner of Prospect Street and Milton Avenue had been preserved. (It was demolished decades ago and replaced by a gas station.)

It also bothers Nancy that people nowadays call the lovely, wide street that intersects with Eastern Avenue "Hyde Boulevard."



The date that is hand-written on the back of this photograph borrowed from a Rooney family album is February 13, 1904. The place: Adele Cunningham's residence. Those present: a virtual who's who of young Ballston Spa society that year -- including Andy and Nancy Reynolds Rooney's then single parents. Top row (left to right) are: Lu McCreedy, Jamie Verbeck, Ellinor Reynolds, Walter Rooney and Bessie Kerley. Middle row: Bessie Valentine, Malcolm Medbery, Adele Cunningham, Jack Gorman and Julie Newell. Front row: Bernard and Mary Redmond, Joe Sweeney, Alice Raymond and George Verbeck. Ellinor Reynolds and Walter Rooney got married several years later -- in 1911. The two photographs below, from the collection of Chris Morley, show Front Street as it looked in the late 1800s when the Eagle Hotel stood in the place of the current Post Office building. A beautiful church with huge white columns also once stood where Front Street intersects with Milton Avenue. Bottom right photo show the downtown core as it was in the early 1900s.

During her childhood, that thoroughfare was Blood Street and a section of the community just outside the village limits was known as Bloodville. Both signs were erected in honor of Isaiah Blood, who operated a nationally acclaimed axe and scythe works where he was reputed to be "ever kind and considerate" toward his numerous employees.

That the legacies of George West and Isaiah Bood have grown dim is a source of lament for Nancy, whose passion for preserving local history also seems to have been "inherited" from her ancestors. Several members of both the Rooney and Reynolds families, for example, were heavily involved in the Village of Ballston Spa's 1907 Centennial Committee.

That was, of course, before Nancy was born and before her first trip to the village as an infant some 90 years ago! "Mother and father brought me up from New York City on a night boat as a baby and I'm told I cried all the way."

Her first vivid memories of Ballston Spa date back to the age of five when her parents arranged for her to stay in the village during the dread flu epidemic of 1918.

Nancy clearly recalls, for example, that Uncle Fred, who was 15 years older than her father, risked his own life to transport gravely ill -- and contagious -- villagers to a Sunday School building or chapel on Milton Avenue that was serving as a makeshift emergency hospital.

"I remember we'd be sitting at my grandparents' house having breakfast when Uncle Fred would walk in wearing his coonskin coat and coonskin cap and drop that so and so died last night. It was always the flu that had killed them."

Each time he departed, her grandmother would caution: "Oh, Fred! Be careful!"

In retrospect, Nancy marvels that neither Uncle Fred nor any other Rooney ever got the flu which claimed so many lives that year. It is especially remarkable given the fact that the Rooney's Auntie Belle (wife of

Uncle Bill) worked as a "volunteer nurse" at the makeshift hospital during the same dread flu epidemic.

When family members did require medical care, they always consulted Dr. Sherman who saw patients in a white house with columns near the present-day library on Milton Avenue.

Nancy further remembers that one of her Uncle Bill's legal clients left a large yellow house with a wide center doorway at the corner of Front Street and Court Street to be used as a community hospital. Later, a member of the Benedict Family bequeathed a larger property on Rowland Street that became The Benedict Memorial Hospital.

In the years that followed the flu epidemic, Nancy enjoyed many family excursions from Albany to Ballston Spa to visit her grandparents, her Uncle Bill and Auntie Belle and her Uncle Fred and Aunt Ella.

When in the village, Nancy enjoyed walking with her mother. Favorite



destinations included Shaeffer's Market, Thoma's Bakery, Welch's (which Nancy says had some of the most beautiful clothing around), and Winney's, where the bolts of fabric, patterns, needles and thread made a lasting impression on her.

Nancy recalls that Feenie's was the place to buy books while Joe Sweeney's (her mother called it Quinn's) was the best drug store where ice cream was made on the premises. During a recent return visit to Ballston Spa, Nancy stopped for lunch at JeRon's Banquet House on Low Street, which was a busy train station in her youth and remembered that a coal yard used to be across the road.

When Grandfather Rooney died, Auntie Belle and Uncle Bill, who had been living on Remsen Street, moved in with Grandmother Rooney at 23 Church Avenue. She lived with her son and daughter-in-law until her death in 1926 and, as was the custom in those days, was laid out in the front parlor. Among those who came to pay their last respects were young Nancy and Andy Rooney.

Uncle Bill and Auntie Belle continued to live at 23 Church Avenue until their own deaths in 1950. Half of the property was left to Nancy and Andy, but as both were working far from Ballston Spa by then, the property that held so many happy memories was put on the market.

After their aunt and uncle were interred in the family plot inside the cemetery on Ballston Avenue a half century ago, neither Nancy nor Andy had much reason to return to the village.

Although she retired from the full-time work force 30 years ago, Nancy kept busy traveling, collecting antiques and old china and playing golf. Three years ago when vision problems prompted her to turn in her driver's license, Nancy resolved to give up something else near and dear to her heart:



Walter Scott Rooney is seated (second from left) as he looked in his senior portrait published inside the 1906 edition of The Ballston Spa High School yearbook, *The Phonograph*. The "Class Prophecy" section of the publication predicted the following about Andy Rooney's father: "Walter was making his way in the world as a lawyer and (the writer) wondered if he practiced a little game o' bluff as much now as when he was in school . . . he used to be good at that then, especially when the period was almost gone, and many were the times his talk kept the rest of us from being called upon when we did not know our lessons.

her apartment in Albany.

It was then that she moved into Prestwick Chase of Saratoga where meals, housekeeping and transportation services are provided along with social, recreational and enrichment activities.

One thing that has not changed is where Nancy spends her summers. For her, there is no better place than the property overlooking Lake George that her parents bought in 1926. Among the cherished possessions in her living room is a collection of paintings by her late "Uncle Beak" that mostly depict family members relaxing at the Upstate camp.

Nancy also supports a number of organizations in and around the greater Capital/Saratoga Region including: The

Albany Academy and The Albany Academy for Girls, The Albany Institute of History & Art, Capital District YMCA, The Children's Museum at Saratoga, Historic Albany Foundation and The Saratoga County Historical Center at Brookside.

Last year Nancy arranged to bring Pulitzer-prize winning Albany author William Kennedy in for a talk at Prestwick Chase of Saratoga, but hasn't yet asked her famous brother, with whom she converses on the phone frequently and sees at family celebrations and holidays, to follow suit.

"People are always asking me what it's like to have a brother like Andy Rooney. Give me a break! He's just a brother . . . a wonderful brother, but just a brother."

Spoken like a true sibling!



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REAL ESTATE

Why Rooney's aunt and uncle left such a lasting impression on Ballston Spa

Andy Rooney once noted that his late Uncle Bill "divided the time he spent with his law practice between petty legal matters for local residents and trying to drive the leaders he thought were crooks out of Saratoga."

His older sister, Nancy, recalls being warned by family elders in Ballston Spa to be careful who she told that she was related to William Rooney. "People either loved him or they hated him," recalls Nancy. "There was no in between."

Yet when he passed away suddenly of a heart attack in 1950 -- just six weeks after the passing of his beloved wife, Annabel Cole Rooney -- the line of mourners could not have been longer. Tributes poured in from far and wide and newspaper publishers made space for words praising his legacy.

"All Saratoga County testified to the popularity and esteem in which William (Bill) Rooney was held when ... his associates, friends and neighbors, in unprecedented numbers, paid him final tribute at funeral services held from his late home," stated a *Ballston Journal* editorial.

"More popularly known as Bill throughout the community of which he made himself a vital part, his sudden and unexpected death at the wheel of his automobile left Ballston Spa completely unprepared for the news, but not without praise for the sage attorney who was admired for his ethics in professional and private life. A tribute to him -- of which the profession of law may be justly proud -- comes from many former clients who express their belief that no one ever had their interests more at heart, or placed their material gains before any personal considerations or interests."

What the newspapers did not report, according to Rooney, was that after Uncle Bill died, the lawyer settling his estate found hundreds of unpaid bills in his law office. "Because (my sister Nancy and I) were his heirs, the lawyer asked if we wanted to pursue collecting them. It was obvious that Uncle Bill never had any intention of collecting from people who were not making much money and we followed what we knew were his wishes in the matter."



PHOTO BY ANN HAUPRICH

Brookside Museum was once owned by Rooney relatives

When the couple Andy and Nancy Rooney called Auntie Belle and Uncle Bill acquired Brookside at a tax sale in 1936, they had no intention of making the historic property their home. Rather Annabel Cole Rooney and William Rooney offered the landmark, constructed as The Aldridge House in 1792, as a gift to the Village of Ballston Spa to be used as a community center -- only to be turned down.

This is but one of the fascinating tales contained in Field Horne's 1984 book titled "The First Respectable House: Brookside and the Growth of Ballston Spa." Now called The Saratoga County Historical Center at Brookside, the estate originally attracted tourists from the Southern USA and Europe who ventured to Ballston Spa to savor the village's then abundant mineral waters.

Brookside changed not only owners but also missions numerous times between 1792 and 1936. By the time the property ended up in the Rooney family, it had been a resort hotel, a boarding school, a sanitarium, a privately owned residence and a rental accommodation.

While no Rooneys ever lived at Brookside, Horne notes that they "conscientiously cared for the house." According to Horne's book, Bill Rooney had the house painted in the first year of their ownership for \$1,500 and replaced the roof for \$3,000 in the following year. During this time, Dee and Jane Weed rented the house from the Rooneys and after World War Two ended, Uncle Bill -- growing tired of the upkeep -- offered to give Brookside to his now famous nephew who was then just laying the groundwork for his phenomenal career. Years later, Andy Rooney would recall: "My wife (Margie) liked the house all right, but the idea of living in Ballston Spa didn't appeal to her and I can't say I was enthusiastic about it myself at the time. Presented with the opportunity today, we might have decided otherwise. My wife is more interested in history and preservation than I am. I spend full-time trying to preserve myself."

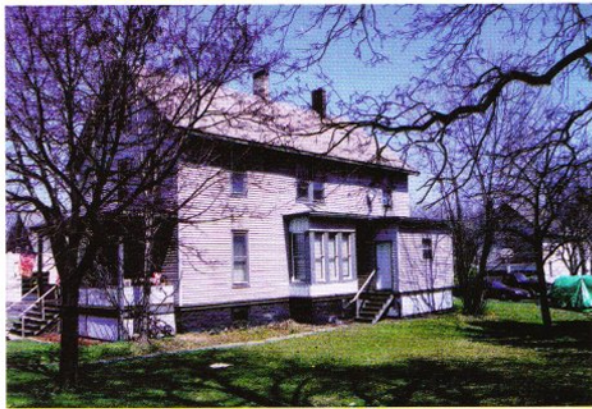
It was with a heavy heart that Rooney declined his beloved uncle's offer to become Brookside's lord and master. "I'm afraid I disappointed him when I said I didn't want it."



OLD BROOKSIDE PHOTO COURTESY
CHRIS MORLEY COLLECTION

By the time he sat down to write the terms of his will shortly before his death in 1950, Uncle Bill had decided to leave his residual estate -- including Brookside -- to be divided among his surviving nephews and neices: Andrew A. Rooney, Nancy Reynolds Rooney, Charles A. Rooney and his wife, Mildred. So, with none of the family interested in occupying the house, Brookside was sold for \$11,000 on October 2, 1951, to Bradford and Elsie Smith. The rest, as they say, is recent history.

For more information, visit www.brooksidemuseum.org



The house at 23 Church Avenue in early 1900s and today. When William Rooney and Annabel Cole wed in 1905, a well-wisher circulated a humorous handbill in the village with a message that read: "MARRIED AT LAST! After many years of patient courting. You can tell them by that blissful expression. Be sure to shake hands and kiss the bride!" Upper right shows the Rooneys in later years.

In addition to the unpaid bills, Andy and Nancy discovered clients had tucked money away in various nooks and crannies of their uncle's law office. "They weren't huge sums -- a few dollars here; a few dollars there -- but it was pretty obvious some had left the money after Uncle Bill refused to accept payment for his work," recalls Nancy. "Uncle Bill was a top notch attorney and he could have made a lot of money through his practice, but he didn't. He wasn't in it for the money, that's for sure."

The 1950 *Ballston Journal* editorial did find it important to mention that "only six weeks before his death, perhaps the richest portion of Mr. Rooney's unselfish life was terminated with the death of his wife with whom he had lived for 55 years. He bore the shock of his loss well, however, and enduring the short period without her, continued to practice his profession energetically and enthusiastically, in addition to retaining the prominent role in civic and fraternal affairs which he earned many years ago."

Those civic and fraternal affairs included having been a member of the Franklin Lodge F & A.M. since 1904, a longtime member of the Utopian Club, and legal counsel for the Town of Ballston for several years. He also served on the Board of Directors of Benedict Memorial Hospital for 15 years.

Auntie Belle had attended village schools



and delivered the valedictorian essay upon her graduation in 1895 "after having maintained throughout her high school course, the highest grades ever attained by any pupil for many years." She subsequently taught in the Jockey Street, Dry Bridge and Ballston Spa school districts.

In the obituary, Auntie Belle was credited with having been one of the incorporators of the local Women's Club and with having worked in the local chapter of the American Red Cross -- both as an officer and a member -- during both World Wars. She acted as a volunteer nurse during the 1918 flu epidemic when an emergency hospital was opened in the then Presbyterian Chapel on Milton Avenue. A member of the Benedict Memorial Hospital Auxiliary, she served as its secretary for many years.

Her greatest love, however, reportedly lay in the Baptist Church of which she was a longtime member. Her church involvement included teaching a Sunday School class, being a member of the Missionary Committee, the Evangelistic Committee and being active in women's groups.

The Rev. John B. Freestone officiated at the funeral services of both Auntie Belle and Uncle Bill. Both were buried in the village cemetery, which is also the final resting place of Andy Rooney's parents, Walter and Ellinor Rooney and other family members.

Want to learn more about YOUR ancestors?

If reading about the ancestors of Andy Rooney and Nancy Reynolds Rooney has sparked interest in your own family history, you might consider contacting Heritage Hunters. Devoted to the study and preservation of genealogical and historical materials in and around Saratoga County, Heritage Hunters hosts conferences and provides research assistance to those wishing to learn more about their roots. The group's web site (www.rootsweb.com) includes a page that is updated daily to include new material dealing with such topics as Saratoga surnames, cemetery material and the Revolutionary War.

Heritage Hunters will be celebrate its 10th anniversary in the Community Room of the Saratoga Public Library from 10 a.m. till 3:30 p.m. on September 20. Participants are asked to bring a traditional dish to share and the recipe.