

576 Main Street
Aurora, NY 13026

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JAN 28 2026
BY: _____

January 22, 2026

Community Preservation Panel
Aurora, NY 13026

Panel Members,

I am requesting the structures on my property at 576 Main Street, Aurora, NY be added to the list of historic buildings in the Village of Aurora. The house and two remaining barns were all built by 1903 by the Maloney Brothers of Aurora to be the home of the Grandview Poultry Farm. This operation was already internationally known for its single-combed White Leghorn Chickens. Charles W. Wycoff began this enterprise about 20 years earlier on a farm near Groton NY, had out gown that space, and chose this available land because of its proximity to the lake to keep it warm and the ,shelter of the northern gully. When completed he moved his flock of 2000 birds, and then his family to their new home. Cornell Agriculture professors frequently brought visiting international dignitaries here to see "a typical American poultry farm." It flourished here until 1929 when it was sold to the Kenyon family.

The house is an example of vernacular architecture with characteristics of the then still popular "Stick-built Style". Its only major alteration in over 125 years was the removal of "gingerbread" attached high above the porch railings. One section of side railing has been removed and the wide side steps were added about 50 years ago. When the house was built, Route 90 was within thirty feet of the front steps, and a side drive curved up to the two barns.

In 2007 I applied for, and was granted the last of the New York State Matching Barn Grants for Historic Barns located on Major Highways. Rick Lazarus agreed to do the work needed. Both roofs were replaced, the Brown Barn's foundation was reinforced, and the stall section of the Gray Barn was rebuilt.

I have attached part of the report I wrote when I gave a talk about the property to the Aurora Historical Society ten years ago, and am happy to supply more information about the farm if requested.

Sincerely,

Claire Morehouse

Claire R. Morehouse

Investigations are fun...Eaten white eggs? You're connected to this farm...and so are people around the world.. For almost thirty years Aurora, through the Grandview Farm was on the world map!

The Barns...two, and the house are all that are left of this extremely well run poultry farm...but the work of its most observant, careful, way ahead of his time original owner, Charles H Wyckoff and his son, E. L. is evident throughout the world...really wherever white eggs are eaten. Their producers are most likely descendants of the Single Comb White Leghorns that were bred here. The Wyckoffs would be horrified at the small cage conditions in which most of these current leghorn hybrids live.

The Barns....My recent research has been prompted by the Cayuga County 4-H people and the brochure they are preparing for a drive-by historic barn tour in our county. Linda Schwab contacted me, perhaps a month ago, to see if I knew anything about our barns...and because I had applied for a historic barn grant in 2005 I had done research...and did know something about them. Now I know more.. and want to discover more yet.

The two remaining barns are part of what was the most progressive poultry farm in America. The "brown barn", covered with cedar shake shingles, was the Brooding Barn. It is 20' x 70', has a full basement, first floor and second floor each divided into four main rooms. Running water (from the single well that supplied this whole enterprise) and electricity ran to this building. The basement had a single line of incubators that ran its length. The first floor housed the farm office at the southern end, adjacent to that, in the center was the large woodworking shop, next came a hospital room for chickens needing help, and at the north end, by the door was the packing and shipping room for both fertile eggs and baby chicks.

The second story was primarily used for storage as far as I can tell, though in the farm's second incarnation, it served as sleeping quarters for campers...and at one time for Owen Kenyon's mistress...another story.

The "gray barn", or Carriage Barn, also has a basement, first floor, and a very tall second story. Horses stalls and an area for hitching, grooming, etc as well as a large open area are in the lower area. This is accessable from the pasture behind for animals, and from the front, facing the house, for the rest of us. The next, upper ground floor is divided into three areas with a storage closet at the back that runs the length of the barn. Behind each of the set of great doors is one large bay...These originally were for wagons, and later for cars and trucks. Two ladders run up the walls through hatches to the top level. This originally was for hay storage...There are shoots that run to the mangers in each of the stalls way below...and there are three large doors with pullys above them left from times when hay was hoisted to fill this very large space.

Both barns needed help when we bought this...no not we...David...bought this piece of land and its buildings in 1971. We'll come back to this...But in 2005 I appied for, and won the last of the matching Barn Grants offered by New York State for historically important barns that are visable from major highways. Those were the primary qualifications.

I knew Rick Lazarus had been working on Pleasant Rowland's barns, but was hesitent to contact him...afraid of his cost, and thinking my barn jobs were probably too small for him to be interested. I received two estimates from local contractors...was not particulary impressed by them, and screwed up my courage to contact Rick. His esitmate was the lowest, and it was a delight to watch him and the

young men working with him decide what needed to be done...and do it well. Rick's only work is with barns, and ancient houses. He was responsible for moving the house at Pumpkin Hill from its original Genoa site.

The Brooding Barn work was quite straight forward. It badly needed a new roof, some window frames, and the basement was beginning to cave in. So...The basement was braced with steel, the steel roof went right on over the old shake shingle roof, and the windows were repaired.

I once went out to the men, and not seeing Rick, and asked others where he was. They responded that he was communing with the Carrage Barn. This interested me. He really didn't know, they explained, what to do with the north side of the barn that was slowly sliding to the gully. He was in that lower section waiting to be told by the barn how to proceed. When he came out, they assured me, he would have a plan. He did.

The whole north wall of the that area of the barn was removed and set against a convenient row of trees about four feet down in the gully. The next day he arrived with many 6" x 6" pieces of oak, each about five feet long. With these he built a square tower below beams in the ceiling of the harnising room in front of the horse stalls. (No horses were using them) At the top of the tower he laid a square platform, and on that he set two jacks...car jacks. Every day he would jack the beams up..maybe a quarter of an inch. He raised the whole section of the barn up about eight inches.

While this was happening he replaced sills beneath the great doors on the opposite side of the barn and completed work on the Brooding Barn.

So the north side of the Carriage Barn stood level. Sister beams were attached either side of the existing beams in that section where the jacking had taken place, and then a new buttressed foundation was created the length of that wall about three feet from the gully edge. Gravel was laid inside that area...and the wall was carried from its gully supports and replaced. The doors to the stall area had to be corrected on the bottom since someone had just reshaped them when the shifting had begun years ago.

Rick then told me he had signed the barn...in a place I would never find, but someone, someday would.

The project was completed.

The house has interesting history too. It was completed in 1903 and, I have been told, was the first house in the village with both inside plumbing and electricity. It is fine, honest house with few frills, but was designed to hold not only the Wyckoff seniors who were in their early 50s, their 25 year old son E. L. but hired men as well. Their quarters were rather separated from the Wycoffs. The kitchen now has a beam across the ceiling about 1/3 of the way from the north end. A wall was once there making a small room where the hired men ate at a little table. They had their own staircase to two rooms above the kitchen.

Additionally, there were two small bedrooms off the hall downstairs used as bedrooms for workers. I don't know if these men shared the single bathroom on the first floor of the house. I rather expect they had an out house assigned to them.

Old Jim, Mac told me always lived in the larger of the two rooms up

stairs. He was responsible for the upkeep of the house and gardens.. probably the lawn too. I have often thought fondly of Old Jim and wished he was back. The little house to the north, now owned by Stan Zabriskie, was the farm foreman's home.

So much for architecture.
Questions?

Charles H. Wyckoff, breeder of the then famous Single Combed White Leghorn chickens, had apparently come from Brooklyn to Groton as a young man. He was a mechanic trained to work on and repair locamotive engines. How he got into farming, I don;t yet know, but his work in every way seems to have been methodical and meticulous.

He found a run down six acre farm in the Groton area, and with his father's help took out a mortgage to buy it in 1881. I calculate that he was then 21 years old. He bought some good looking chickens at a state fair in Elmira from a man named George Weed, and raised crops he on his six acres.. The chickens were prolific and he sold eggs in the New York City market. They were his best paying crop! So...he bacame a poultry man, and for the better part of fifteen years provided "table eggs", large white eggs,for the city.

All the time he was carefully breeding his birds to increase their strength, vigor, and rapid development, their quiet nature, and their egg production which averaged just under 300 eggs each year per hen. C. H. Wyckoff experimented with bird housing, ventilation, yard size and poultry nutrition. He made contacts with poultry professors at Cornell. In the late 1890s, he managed a flock of roughly 600 birds at the Groton location, and was selling more eggs and chicks for breeding stock than he was for scrambling.

It was time to move.

As he did everything else, Charles Wyckoff was careful in acquiring land. He knew he wanted a temperate climate, as best he could get in upstate New York, and set out to find it. In 1900 he purchased, for \$1000, nine acres of land from Michael VanBuskirk and began to build his farm here that could support roughly 1200 Wyckoff S. C. White Leghorns as they were now known in the poultry community. He never expanded beyond that claiming, "Quantiy production is never achieved without the sacrifice of quality."

The barns and yards were established first, and then the house. Around his Groton yards, Wyckoff had planted plum trees for shade and an extra crop. Here, he planted peaches...not all the same kind... a variety. Again, we can see his inquisitive mind leaving its mark. Apparently the family had a great interest in trees for walnut trees followed, English grafted onto Black Walnut stock. My black walnut woods must have started with that root stock. Existing trees in the yard were well cared for... The front yard was not as wide as it is now, for the original road came quite close to the front steps.

About the time of this move to Aurora, different goals seemed to split poultry growers. Some were focused on production; others were determined to raise perfect breed standard specimens. Wyckoff belonged to the first camp...perhaps was a leader, and although Linda Schwab found evidence that he bred for show as well as production, I only found reference to the latter... He is quoted, " To a poultry breeder, as to an artist, skill comes with practice and experience—for the poultry breeder is indeed an artist. Others may hold ideals similar to ours, but we have learned many things in 48 years of effort, always breeding for one type of bird." He named that type, his S. C. White Leghorns, "America's business hen."

I was intrigued to learn that all the Wyckoff birds were inbred. Wyckoff is quoted in A Visit to Wyckoff's Grandview Poultry Farm, "Frankly, we pay no attention to whether our mated birds, when they finally get to the laying houses after we have selected or culled them carefully, are or are not brothers and sisters. I have studied this matter a good many years and cannot see that it makes any difference.

We select very carefully according to our experience and best judgement for size and vigor, then we aim to house and feed properly....All these years it has been to my interest, and to that of our thousands of customers, to learn about this matter and I know that today our birds are better than ever as to size, vigor, health and egg production, and I claim this is the answer and proof, in combination with the fact that they never have had disease and now lay better than at any time in the past, according to our requirements in yearly egg production.

The interview for this quote was made in 1920. Wyckoff continued to develop his birds, his trees, and offer many visits to his "typical American Farm" to visiting agriculturalists from many different countries through his contacts with Cornell. He clearly took great pride in his work, and worked hard until his death December 30, 1922. He is buried in Ithaca.

His son continued here, with an increasing interest in trees, specifically pecans, two of which still stand near our house. In July of 1929, he and his mother Lilia, ran an add in the New York Times advertising the farm for sale. (You remember, the great crash was in October of that year.) Owen Kenyon saw the add, and fell in love with the romance of becoming a poultry farmer. The transaction took place before October 1929.

Questions?

The Kenyon family was rich. They owned the Kreskee chain of stores known as 5 and 10s...which I loved to go to as a little girl, with my dime...Owen went to his father and grandfather and asked for his inheritance early...to buy the Grandview Farm. Not knowing anything about the business, he and his wife Helen, and two very handsome young children, Frank and Ruth, moved Aurora...and the Wyckoffs moved to Georgia to continue raising chickens as well as Pecan trees.

The Kenyons had, among other things, two interesting connections. Helen Kenyon was born Helen Ruth, not at all well to do, but a cousin of Babe Ruth. She also had a nephew whose mother, Frieda, worked all summer as a beauty consultant in a fine Pittsburg store. This nephew needed a place to spend his summers ...and came each summer to live with them. His name was Ralph MacDonnell, whom many of us remember, simply as Mac. When Helen died, she left The Pines a fine point of lake shore across Route 90 and the little tenent house to Mac.

What I know of the Kenyons is all thanks to Mac:

They were a wealthy (though not becoming richer) rollicking group. Apparently Owen's mother spent much of her summers here too, rocking on the front porch. Every time a feed truck rolled up the driveway she would sigh, "There goes another \$2000.

But they were moneyed...They drove a great long touring car that

would not completely fit in our garage. They also owned a summer house at Alexandria Bay, and went there most weekends. They could not leave their pony behind, so it rode in the car in the wide space between the front and the back seats. They tethered it in the yard of the summer house at Alex Bay.

Mac recalled evening formal dinners in the dining room here, or in Alex Bay, where fine silver was used and Owen demanded equally fine table manners. That was rather early on.

Kenyons gave great parties...and shore dinners. It was a romp!

They had fun...Their wine and whiskey bottles piled up in the gully....Not wanting to go around to one of the two doors off the porch to the house, Kenyons and guests often just left the windows wide open and stepped through them.

There was a Thanksgiving when everyone had just celebrated the day too much, and they sat in a circle on the livingroom floor with a plattered turkey in the middle to complete the festivities.

The kids ususally slept in a tent. On hot nights they all, adults and children, dragged mattresses down to sleep under the Oak Tree in the front yard.

The farm continued its downward spiral.

Young children grew up.

Mac and Frank spent a few years in New York where they lived in a hotel and earned their keep as handsome lifeguards at the hotel pool. Somewhere along the line, there were two weddings.

Frank married Tudy...always appreciated as Tudy Kenyon, although that marriage lasted only one week. After that Tudy pitched her own tent under the Oak Tree...finished with marriage. Frank drifted off to the Bahamas where he became a successful hotelman.

Ruth married Billy Bush. They stayed here and tried to raise turkeys and ran a summer camp for a few years. Older people have told me they had a great time at that summer camp!

Owen found new love, and being a rather sporting soul, the woman involved lived in the top of the Brooding Barn for some time. This did not impress Helen Kenyon, who never spoke to him for the last ten years of his life. I do not know where the Kenyons are burried.

Ruth found religion, gave a great sum of money to the chruch and ended up in the Bahamas where she, too, did well.

She was beautiful and came walking up our driveway one summer afternoon with a fine young man in tow. She was pleased to see the house and delightful to talk to. She went down to visit Mac. He would'nt open the door.

Mac could not forgive Ruth for having abandoned her mother. After Owen's death, Helen gave away all the chicken houses in an attempt to lower her taxes. She rented rooms to tourists, and when Doctor Burlington diagnosed her cancer, he also told her the best thing to do for it was to enjoy her dogs and her porch for as long as she could. She did just that...and Mac came every weekend from his home in Rochester to be with her.

in 1968

After Helen's death, and an auction, the house and land were sold to Ryan and Susan Oaks. They worked to restore the house (being a bit

battered) for most of the first year and moved in to live here with their three young children for two years until Ryan was transferred to a new job.

And here is where the Morehouses come in...but, not in a particularly ususal way.

It took ten years for David to admit to this.

Ryan Oaks was a boyhood friend of my husband. Ryan stopped to visit at Hibiscus Harbor when David was the manager, and asked David to broker his cruiser since he was being transferred. David happily agreed and asked Ryan what he was doing with his house. Ryan responded that the house was going on the market the next day.

David allowed that he would buy the house...that day.

He came home and rather casually told me there was a house in Aurora that he thought I might want to look at...We drove by and I was not at all interested...way too big...way more than we needed. We only had one little boy, Randy who was just four....no...no...no...

But he convinced me. ... and I have never been sorry. This was 1971

We could only get inside it once because of awful weather before we were the owners...and we rented it to the Oakes for three months before we could move in...and since then we have had fun here too.. but not as the Kenyons did. We welcomed our second son, Nathaniel, lots of visiting children, one'fresh air son', exchange students, horses, dogs, old friends, new friends, and now grandchildren.

When people ask me why I want to live in "that great big house by myself", I respond that I am thinking of adding on.