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# Airport Farm

*Betty Matalavage*

In the late 1930s, the farm around the intersection of Meeghan Road and South Gilboa Road was owned by John Conrow and Ulysses “Uly” Clark. I think they were brothers-in-law who were both very active in the South Gilboa community. Since they had a long, flat meadow on their property, my cousin Dayton Griffin, who lived in Stamford, leased the land and built a hanger for his plane on the site.

Over time, the Conrow-Clark farm became known as Airport Farm. After the hay was cut on the field, Dayton organized a weekend air show to which the public was invited. Dayton charged for an airplane ride but there was also a hot air balloon that everyone marveled at as it took off into the air and soared away. The balloon was followed carefully by a truck that met the balloon on landing and then returned it to the airport.

During World War II, Dayton was in Alaska working on the hydraulic systems of our Army planes. The freezing temperatures there caused the systems to malfunction. After the war, he moved to Florida and for years ran a trailer park in Pinnelas Park.

As a very young girl I remember he would often buzz our house: we’d come out into the yard and he’d stall the engine and yell, “I’ll be down for dinner” or “I’ll be right down as soon as I land.” Then a few minutes later, he’d come running cross-lots over the hill. Often his wife came out for dinner or supper too and then they’d return to Stamford.

Another native of South Gilboa, Ken Dean, used to parachute over the airport and this, too, was watched with awe. For its time, this was quite an event. Ken was killed in an air show in Oneonta when his chute failed to open. Most of his friends and neighbors were in attendance at the air show and I remember the horror of that day. The crowd was stunned.

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