

# THE RIKERT HOMESTEAD

CHS Landmark: 27 Shadblow Lane



*A Clinton Historical Landmark  
by Donna Townsend Miller*

Years ago we would drive along Shadblow Lane, in the hamlet of Bulls Head, and my father would point out a large clapboard farmhouse sitting on a small hill. That Rikert house, my father would say, used to overlook acres of open farmland. Now, that open space is limited to the gracious lawns of the present owner and other homeowners in the area, but primarily it has grown into woodlands.

The first Rikert to arrive in America was Joseph Reichart (Rikert); his name appears on a 1710 list of heads of Palatine families arriving in New York from Wurtemberg, Germany. Later the Reicharts and thirty-four other families emigrated to the Hudson Valley, settling near the town of Rhinebeck.

Reuben Rikert, born in 1815, farmed actively until 1881. He sold cattle, acted as an auctioneer, served as a trustee of estates and guardian for minors, organized and taught singing schools, and was Clinton Town Justice for eight years. He was also one of the leading men in the early church at Schultzville, where he and his

wife are buried, and a strong prohibitionist. In 1855 he purchased the 170-acre Bishop farm (previously owned by Frederick Schultz) a half-mile south of the Bulls Head post office, but George Bishop almost did not sell it to him because of strong disagreements on the liquor question. Reuben was a total abstainer and the neighbors told Bishop that they did not want any "damned cold water Christians" in the community. Apparently "hard cider Christians" were then in the ascendancy.

The present house was constructed in 1868 after the family of Reuben and Rachel (Pettit) Rikert moved into the barn and tore down their old house. They saved usable timbers and lumber from the old house and--along with timber hewed from the woodlots on the farm--used them in the "new" construction. John Ham worked as mason and Peter Deidrich handled the carpentry. The cost of this 12-room house, excluding the old lumber taken from the first farmhouse, was \$4000.

An 1886 addition added four rooms to northwest corner of the house at a cost

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of \$1000. Whoever was farming the land used the original area of the house; depending on the size of that farmer's family, Reuben and Rachel resided in different rooms until the 1886 addition provided them with a more permanent "corner." Various tenants worked the land in return for rent-free accommodations or shares. When Reuben died in April 1903, his daughter Rachel and her husband Theodore Lawless were operating the homestead farm. (They purchased a different farm approximately a year later.) Reuben's youngest son Irving (1862-1932) rented the farm in 1904 and purchased it in May 1905.

"Uncle Irv," as my father referred to him died after being horribly gored by a bull. His tragic death brought home a reality. I recall that we children were never permitted near the dairy bull, and my father was extremely careful. As soon as it was practical, and when the dairy industry began utilizing artificial insemination, my father rarely ever had a bull on his farm.

Beginning in the late 1880s, the Rikert family reunions were held on the Sunday closest to Reuben's birthday, at the homestead where Shadblow and Pumpkin lanes intersect. When I was a child, the Rikert reunions were held on the second Sunday in August, but the location had changed to the home of Farley and Lillie Rikert on Prospect Hill Road in Stanford near the Clinton line. After my great-grandfather Farley died in May 1954, these reunions ended.

*Donna Miller is a CHS member. She lives on Pumpkin Lane, less than a mile from the Rikert homestead. Source: Rikert family records and genealogy compiled by Middlebury College Professor Carroll Rikert, grandson of Reuben, to honor his Uncle Farley's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday.*

*This article from the Oct 2003 issue of the CHS newsletter Historian*