

## HUTTLESTON'S GARAGE By Diane Merrill

Huttleston's Garage in Smithville Flats is a long time landmark with lots of history. The current building was built around 1900 as a blacksmith shop.

The following text, related to the history of the site, is taken from an oral history given by Will Loomis in 1976:

*Here where Linn Huttleston's garage is, when I went to school, that was just a basement hole – a cellar of a building that had burned. Andy and Ed Harrison had a general store there, and that burned before my time. I don't remember the store.*

*Walter Harrison built the building where Linn has his garage. He was another Harrison family...we weren't very closely related.*

Land ownership at the site can be traced back to 1866 when the owner was Erastus Agard, followed by James J. Flanagan, Herman V. Hoag, and Will S. Hoag. In 1933 it was owned by Myrtle Everett, E.H. Everett, and Leroy Barnes. Linn Huttleston rented from Leroy Barnes from 1932 to 1952 and had many customers and plenty of work.

Linn transformed the old blacksmith shop into a garage and worked on different makes and models of automobiles and trucks during that time. He worked on trucks belonging to Beardsley's Sawmill, the Genegantslet Fire Department, and sometimes on trucks owned by the McDonough Fire Department. He serviced vehicles from Hansmann's Mills and trucks from Tarbell Farms. He also worked on Will Hofmann's milk truck that was used to pick up milk cans from various farms and deliver the milk to the creamery.

Linn operated a wrecker service and also sold gasoline for less than twenty-five cents a gallon (many years ago). At various times, other mechanics worked for him.

At the time Gary Huttleston, Linn's son, graduated from high school in 1958, he joined his father in the business until 1961. Linn and Gary worked together servicing everything from tractors to snow plows to automobiles. In 1971 Gary bought the garage and Linn retired, although he rarely missed a day at the garage for the next fifteen years. He and Gary were very good at their trade and had a wonderful reputation among their customers.

For a time in the 1970s, Gary's son Brian joined his father and grandfather working at the garage. Four generations of Huttlestons have worked as mechanics.

For many years, Linn didn't have a lift in the garage. When Gary decided to add a bay and install a lift, Linn didn't believe it was necessary. Finally the lift was installed. Then, as the story goes, a man came into the garage for a grease job and oil change, and Linn surprised everyone by refusing the work because the lift was in use. His view of the lift as unnecessary had turned around 180 degrees.

Linn was very popular and well liked in the community. He loved to play cards (for money, of course). He played once or twice a week, mostly at night. If someone came in and wanted to play cards, he would make a call to get others to play. Sometimes if he couldn't get anybody else to play, his wife Lois would join the group. We're not sure whose money she used!

When Linn died on April 28, 1989 at age 83, his funeral was held at the First Presbyterian Church in Smithville Flats. The church was overflowing with friends and family. So many people attended the funeral that all seats were taken, and there was "standing room only." Linn's son Richard placed a "full house" poker hand in his father's hands for the wake.

Gary related an amusing story. A young woman regularly walked by the garage, pushing a baby carriage with squeaky wheels. Gary oiled the wheels of the baby carriage. Buster Wrobel, who witnessed this, said, "that doesn't put bread on the table!" A few days later the woman brought Gary a loaf of bread!

In 1986, due to a huge increase in insurance premiums, Gary closed Huttleston's Garage and took a job at the Greene Central School bus garage. He briefly reopened the garage between March and November of 1998.

The history of Huttleston's isn't over. It continues. Three years ago, two California women came to Smithville Flats to interview Gary. Helena Day Breese said she was writing a book about garages. This spring, she sent Gary a signed copy of the book, *Guys and Garages*, newly published. Complete with narrative and a photo, Gary is one of the featured "garage guys." Now if you want to know about Gary's tattoo depicting a wrench, you'll find the answer in the book.

Gary still owns the building and enjoys tinkering around in his old garage.