

MY PHILMONT

BY JOE HAAG. **PART TWO.**

IN OUR LAST ISSUE, WE PRINTED PART 1 OF THIS STORY, WHICH IS THE STORY OF JOE HAAG'S CHILDHOOD, AND PHILMONT'S HEYDAY. HE TOLD US ABOUT OUTDOOR TOILETS, HIS FAMILY'S FIRST RADIO, A DROWNING, A ONE-CAR PASSENGER TRAIN, HIS UNCLE JOHN'S MODEL-T FORD, PROHIBITION, THE GREAT DEPRESSION, THE KU KLUX KLAN, SAUERKRAUT, CANNING, RAW MILK, BROWN EGGS, AND TROUT FISHING UP AT THE RESERVOIR. HERE'S THE REST—A BANK ROBBERY, AN ICE BOX, THE MILLS, THE RAILROAD BRIDGE, A HURRICANE, AND NINA HOTALING.

The Philmont Bank

The Philmont National Bank closed its doors in 1932. My grandfather had two hundred dollars in the bank set aside for Ann, Hubert, Jim and me, but when the bank got operating again, all he got back was one hundred. He also had stock in the bank and when it opened up again, that stock was worth nothing. When he passed on in 1938, Ma kept the stock. After WWII, it was worth \$10 a share, but the bank wouldn't buy it. It was sometime after that that Ma got a letter saying that the bank was merging with another bank; they offered her \$33 per share and she took it.

The bank had a robbery in 1938; they took off with \$6000. Jim and me was in school and we saw the police cars out the window. The robbers locked everyone in the vault, and took off. Roadblocks were put up, but they got away for a long time.

About 1950, I was having a beer in Poughkeepsie when the bartender asked me where I was from. There was a man sitting beside me, around sixty, and poorly dressed. The bartender pointed at him and said, "Meet the man who robbed the Philmont bank." He said he would have gotten away with it, except he was hitching a ride on a truck to New York City, and the truck driver saw that he had a pistol on him, and turned him in when they got to the city.

Ice Box

Ma would cook just what food we needed to last us a night or two. To keep it cool after a meal, we put it on the cellar floor. In the winter if we had fresh meat, it was kept out in the barn, where it would freeze. It was around 1940 when someone gave Pa an ice box. A few years later, we got a second-hand refrigerator. Around 1946, they tore down the ice houses on the reservoir and the boards were sold for lumber.

The Washing Machine

Ma used to wash all the clothes by hand on a scrub board in a tub, and she had a copper wash boiler in which to soak and boil the clothes. It would take her all day. Around 1936, we got a washing machine with a ringer on it secondhand for \$25. Jim and me liked to watch it run and it was still in good working order in the '80s.

High Rock Mills

The mills were owned by the Harder Family, but the Philips owned them first. Frank Harder went with Philips' daughter and got her pregnant. They had three boys, Louis, Gus, and Philip. Ma took Jim and me for a walk on Maple Avenue and showed us their heavenly home and them in their big cars with chauffeurs. They had electric in there, which was generated off a steam engine up at the mills. When Wall Street crashed, it was the end of that world. Frank lost \$50,000 in one day.

The mills shut down and he died soon after that. Then Louis got control. I felt sorry for Louis, because he'd been a rich boy who had everything he wanted. He tried hard to operate the mills, but he didn't know anything about it. In his last years, I was richer than he was.

High Rock bought up all the mills and shut them down, so they could control the work force, pay cheap wages and make slaves out of the help. They never even invested in new machines, but the mill owner lived in paradise. No wonder we had a depression. .

The Mill House Auction

High Rock was running into the red ink. They owned a lot of mills that they never should have bought up, plus, they owned all those mill houses with the help out of work and no way to pay rent. The auction was set for was late spring and Pa wanted to bid on the house in front of ours.

Around noon, we heard that the auction was being called off because all the bids were too low. When Pa heard that, he said to Ma, "I'm going down to the office to see if they'll sell me that house!" I can still see Pa take off on foot just as fast as he could walk. He came back with a smile on his face. They sold him the house for two hundred dollars and we were filled with joy about it.

Nina Hotaling

Before Pa bought the house, Nina Hotaling lived there for a great number of years and they had to move her out into the street. She wasn't in her right mind. I don't know how she survived the way she did. In the winter time, early in the morning, she would take two empty pails and walk along the road to the coal yard picking up the pieces of coal that had dropped. I would see her at night, sitting at a table, reading. She had been a very well-educated woman; she spoke perfectly, and she had studied music. Mrs. Hotaling had an organ and many times as a child, I would listen to her playing. Years later, from late spring to late fall, she would leave the house in the early morning to walk back and forth along the road with her fingers in her ears. Then she would find a place where she wanted to spend the day and she would sit on the ground all day with her fingers in her ears. She wore as many clothes in the summer as in the winter, and they were real dirty. When it was almost dark, she'd go back into her house. But every summer, she would put on good clothes and go away for a few days; no one knew where to.

The day they moved her out of her house, nobody gave a crap except Father Dwyer. All of us kids and everyone else just watched the show. Some men went inside and took out everything she had and set it all out on the road. Nina too. One man put a padlock on the door.

It started to get hot and we wondered how she was going to set up housekeeping out there in the street, and most of all, we wondered how and where she was going to sleep that night. She walked around and around all her belongings, but mostly she sat, with her fingers in her ears. The church owned the hall next to her house, and Father Dwyer and his hired man came over the hill at around 4. Father Dwyer was a big man with big shoulders and curly black hair, and he had on a white

shirt half unbuttoned down the front and black pants and a look on his face that said he was upset and could and would tear those men apart for doing such a thing to an old woman. He didn't say anything. He just had his man unlock the door to the hall and then the two of them picked up her furniture and belongings and put them in the hall and gave Nina the key. It took them a half hour.

Nina Hotaling lived in the church hall into the late forties, until she couldn't take care of herself anymore and they moved her to a county house in Ghent. I can't explain how she lived to be so old, but she did. A life of filth, dirt poor, with her mind gone, she was independent, stood on her own two feet and was never sick.

The Railroad Bridge

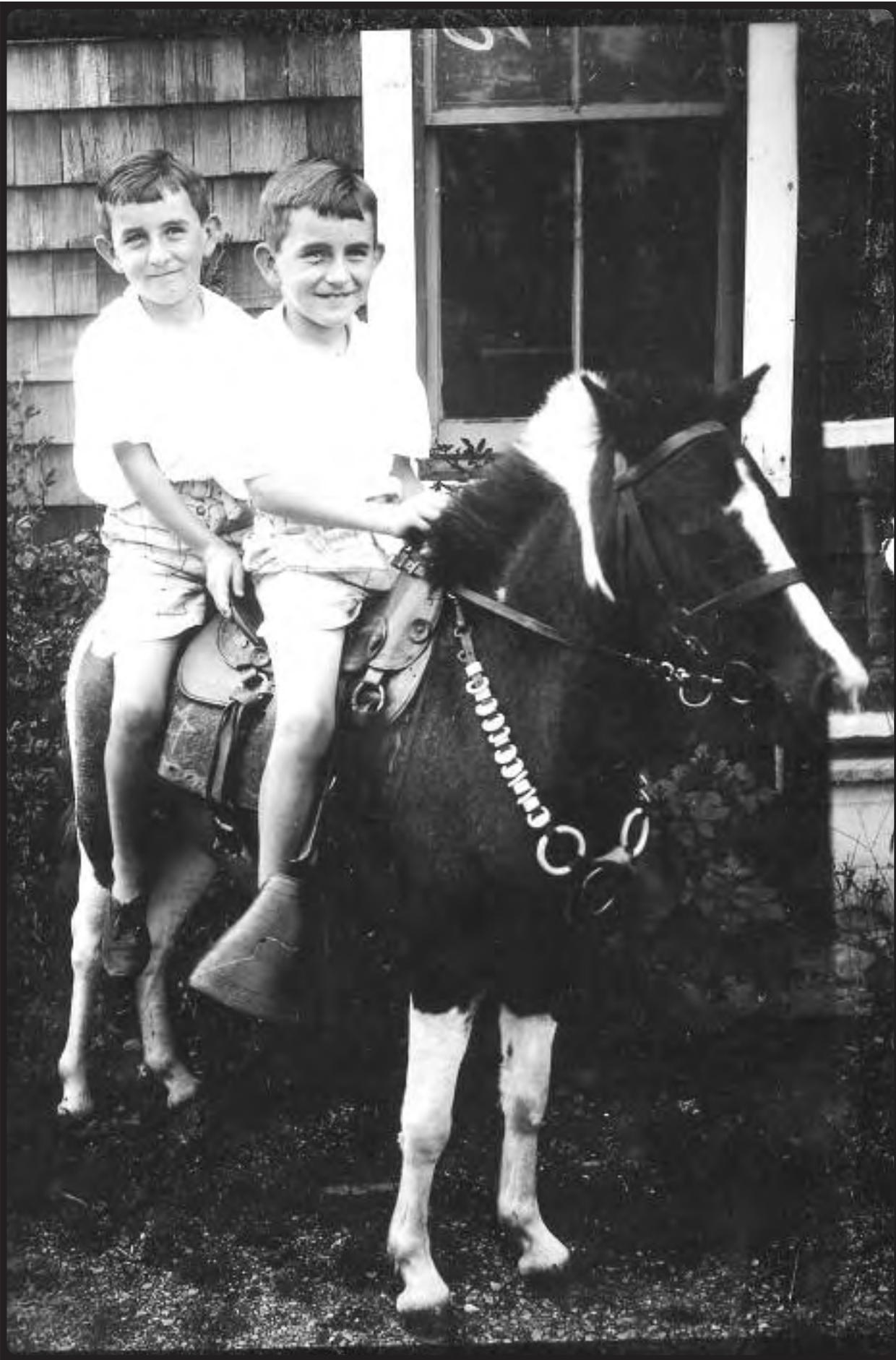
The water was deep at that time and jumping off the railroad bridge was the biggest sport, next to jumping from boxcars. It was around 1938, when the New York Central Railroad had to put in a new abutment on the south side of the bridge. They were using some old passenger coaches fixed over for the workmen to live in. They were parked up on the long siding above the station. They had black roofs and the sides were painted red. At night, you could see the men in the coaches because they were lit up with electric lights. Jim and me thought it must be a lot of fun to live that way and we wished we could be these men and live in the coaches and work on the railroad tracks, and my brother Jim did go to work for the railroad.

The abutment was finished in the fall and Jim and me hated to see the men leave us. One day we came home from school and the sleeping cars and the men were gone. We knew we would never see them again. We went out to see the bridge, but it got dark and cold quickly, so we went back home.

The Hurricane of '38

As Jim and me were twins, we liked to do the same things, and whatever excited him excited me. Most of all, we liked catastrophe! A fire couldn't be big enough for us, and when the reservoir got high, it couldn't get high enough for us. Well, we got the chance to see something really big in 1938.

It was a nice September morning, but then it started to get cloudy. Toward evening, we heard that our grandfather's neighbor, John



Joe Haag (right) and his twin Jim, circa 1933.

McGurt, was missing. Night set in and they still hadn't found him. It started raining that afternoon. They found Mr. McGurt down at High Falls. He had jumped off the high end of the falls and went straight down, over a hundred feet. If he'd have landed a little further out, he'd have gone all the way to the bottom. He was still alive when they found him, but he died within a day. If they wouldn't have found him that afternoon, he might never have been found at all. That same afternoon, it

started to rain and it kept coming.

The next day, the reservoir started to rise and it was high for three days in a row. We couldn't keep our eyes off of it. We kept hoping it would get even higher. About four o'clock that third day, Ma got scared. She kept looking at the railroad bridge, and all at once, she said to Jim, "Go down to the mill and get your father. There's too much water coming into the reservoir."

Pa and Jim came right home and Ma put supper on the table. After

supper, the reservoir was over its banks and the water was going down Ark Street. John appeared and, being the daredevil he was, got into his car, and was going to drive it down the street. Bill Tracey stopped him, which was a good thing, because he never would have made it. The water was taking large chunks of blacktop down the street along with dirt, rocks and boulders. And the reservoir was still rising. Pa and me walked up to the railroad bridge. One of the abutments was washing out and the water

was pouring at a high speed, like from a big pipe. When we got back home, the water was up to our front porch and leaking into our cellar windows. The Ark House had no ground around it, just water; all of Ark Street was washed out down to rock bottom, and two large trees had been torn up. We didn't know it, but everything from the railroad bridge all the way up to Barton's Cider Mill in Martindale was under water.