

Back together—the strange story of a desk key

There is a house on Cliff Street in Canajoharie where my great uncle and aunt lived for many years. Great uncle Ed had made a remarkable business progression during his lifetime. That progression saw him gain employment as an accountant in the early 1900s at Beech Nut Co and advance to chairman of the board within the next fifty years. Isn't it reasonable to assume that within his home he would be the possessor of a fine roll top desk? He did have such a desk. I passed by it many times in the years I was caretaker of that house after his passing in 1968. There was a feeling of subdued grandeur within that house and the roll top desk was part of it. One could not help to ponder on all of the important business deals that it had witnessed. The shiny light colored desk always stood open by the time I watched out for the house as if awaiting someone to sit to it and do more earth-shattering things there. I'm sure that my cousins yet treasured their father's desk. No one lived full time there by the mid 1970s. One wonders if an inanimate piece of furniture like a desk can yearn for its own yesterdays.

After the second son Richard passed away in 2012 the intact interior of the house would soon be part of history. There were several who had keys to gain entry to the house. Soon those who would conduct the house sale had one also. The sale took place and now the house was stripped of its contents. A few days later I learned that a friend had admired and purchased the roll top desk. It was moved to an old farm in Stone Arabia. Since no key to the desk came with it care had to be taken not to completely close it since it would automatically lock. I was asked if I knew someone who could make a key. The desk remained keyless for a few years. Then I remembered that after the sale several keys were left lying on the kitchen counter. No one needed them. I picked them up to add to an accumulation started by grandpa just in case one happened to be useful. Among the keys on the counter was great uncle Ed's leather key case. His initials, EWS, his name, and the word "Reward" were on this, his special set of keys. Quality Ruswin house keys were in the set. Was one of the keys to his Beech Nut office? No matter now since the old Beech Nut building stands deserted in Canajoharie Village.

Again my friend Judy asked where she could get a key to her desk. Then I started to search for uncle Ed's key. Is it possible that his desk key was with the others? Really the chance was very remote. I delivered the keys to my friend last evening and guess what. Not only the desk key but the one to a small compartment were there waiting to be of use again. Now by a strange shake of fate after several years they are back together and Judy can now lock the desk which she doubtless cherishes just like its original owner did.

Skip Barshied, Stone Arabia, May 13, 2013