July, 2026

October 24, 2010, was a special day for the people of Newfield, NY. It was also a special day for the ancestors of Karen Bickle, of Columbia City, IN. It was the day former president Theodore Roosevelt came to the area, and the day some of Karen's ancestors met him.

Roosevelt was touring the state, campaigning for Republican candidates. As part of the tour, he traveled in his big touring automobile beginning at Ithaca, mainly to inspect abandoned farms in the area. Roosevelt determined from what he saw that a good farmer, if he did things the right way, could make a good living on land that is now going to waste.

Of course, Roosevelt toured Connecticut Hill. Karen Bickle's ancestors then lived in the Swan Hill area of Connecticut Hill.

Somehow, Karen's ancestors, or the four school-age sons in that family, got word of Roosevelt's visit and the possibility of him coming near where they lived. Unbeknownst to their parents, the four boys hatched a plot to meet Roosevelt. The oldest, August, was 13.

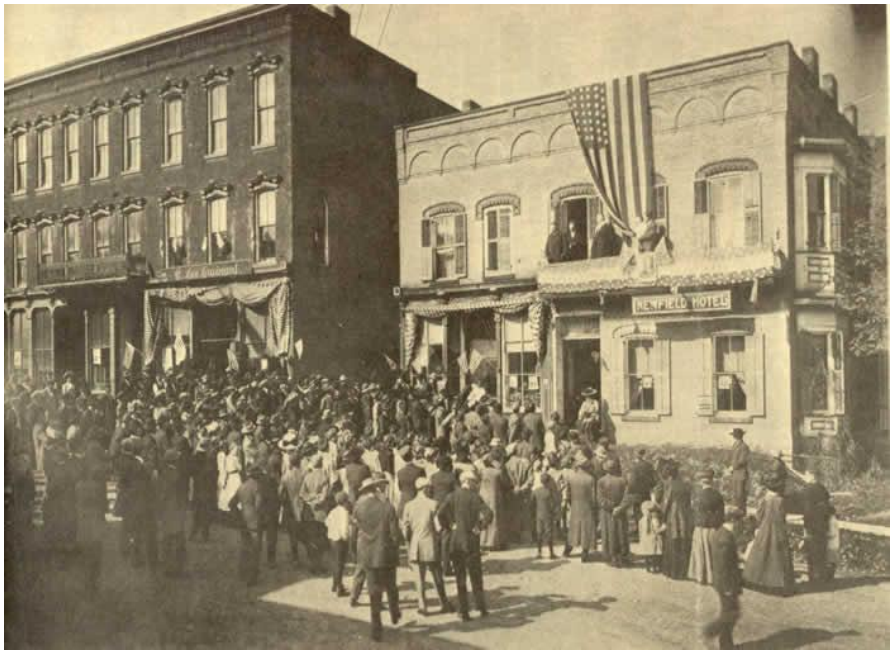
They found a long rope and stretched it across the road nearby Roosevelt was to drive on. The plan was to stop Roosevelt's car. It worked! Roosevelt stopped his car, got out and met the boys. He was very nice to them. He shook each one's hand and gave each boy a few pennies he found in his pockets. How special was that?

Roosevelt went on to the Newfield Hotel, on Main Street, speaking to a large crowd from the hotel balcony at 11:00 A.M. Two bands greeted him. There are photos showing this event. The hotel building still stands today, housing the Newfield Public Library.

In his speech, Roosevelt told of C. A. Schmidt, Karen's ancestor, who came to Connecticut Hill and took up one of the abandoned farms and was making a good living. Mr. Schmidt grew potatoes as a cash crop. Roosevelt must have noticed Schmidt's farm in his tour. Roosevelt likely had a local person with him to point out the different farms.

This is likely the day Fanny VanLone saw an automobile for the first time, not in 1904 or 1905 as she remembered. Fanny said that Roosevelt was driving his car around Connecticut Hill.

Carol E. Fagnan


NEWFIELD HOTEL

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