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“PEG LEG” BATES

BY ELINOR LEVY

One of the greatest privileges of my career in folklore was the opportunity to explore the legacy of Clayton “Peg Leg” Bates, a Black one-legged tap dancer, who owned an interracial Catskills resort for 38 years.

In the fall of 2016, shortly after I became the Folk Arts Program Manager with Arts Mid-Hudson, Geoff Miller, the Ulster County historian, introduced me to Bates’ legacy. Miller had long wanted to do in-depth research on Bates and hoped that I could raise some funds and join him. We were awarded a grant from New York Humanities and began the project in 2021.

Any discussion about Bates must be placed within the context of the multiple histories and events that surrounded his life: the history of Black entertainers during Jim Crow (and beyond), inclusivity/exclusivity in the Catskills resort scene, living differently abled, and Black entrepreneurship before and after the Civil Rights Movement (to name a few). For Miller and me, it was also about the role of white historians and folklorists researching a person of color in the post-George Floyd era.

We discussed at length the fact that Geoff and I are both white Jewish people, and we were very conscious of the issues around researching a Black man. We did not want to presume that we were the people who could or should oversee the project. We spoke with members of the Black community in Kingston and, in essence, got approval as they were concentrating on other projects, such as the African Burial Ground, and recognized that there was a time limit to get information from folks connected to Bates and the resort.



PEG-LEG BATES
Interracial Country Club
Rt. 2, 1 Kerhonkson, N.Y. Box 366
3781 — Phones — 8200

Guest House—Main House—Bungalow—Cottages (with private baths)
Swimming Pool • Lawn Games • Basketball • Baseball • Knotty Pine Bar

Dancing—(Floor show—weekends)
MODERATE RATES
Your host: Peg-Leg Bates

96 miles from New York City. N. Y. State thruway to exit 16, into route 17 West, to exit 13, into 209 North to Herhonkson. Follow signs to club.

Advertising for Peg Leg Bates’ Interracial Country Club in Kerhonkson, New York. Courtesy of the author.

The resort is in disrepair and is being transformed into an equestrian center (although, as of this article, the land appears to have not been altered by anything but nature). I have been to the property several times, once with a drone. While we could never get onto the property, our access to the people who worked and knew Bates is outstanding and ongoing.

To begin, we created a committee whose members included Geoff Miller, David Winograd (a musician who knew Bates and still manages Bates’ lead singer Miss René Bailey), Dave Davidson (director and producer of the film *Dancing*

Man – Peg Leg Bates), Priyanka Sen (an architecture graduate student interested in the vernacular architecture of the resort), Stephen Vider (Priyanka’s advisor), and me. We had two interns, who at the time were students: Joseph Jackson (an ethnomusicology graduate student at Indiana University, Bloomington) and Rennie Raffington (a Livingstone College senior).

We had wonderful access to a cross-section of people who knew Bates personally, including guests at the resort, tap dancers who worked with Bates, church members, and more.

We gathered stories and insights from the amazing cross-section who knew Bates or worked for him and were inspired by him. His daughter, Melody Bates-Holden, gave us insight into her father as a parent and a businessman. Miss René Bailey, the singer in his band, told us about performing with Bates at the resort and on the road in the off-season. We talked with staff members and visitors to the resort.

Bates was an active member of the Samsonville United Methodist Church, where Miss René was choir director. Each Sunday during the season, Bates would invite guests to join him for services, who filled the pews. He provided space at the resort for the church to sell handmade items to raise money, as well as raising funds to build the church hall. One of the last photos taken of Bates was with fellow church members at his birthday party, a few weeks before his death.

The story of Clayton “Peg Leg” Bates is remarkable. From his birth in South Carolina to sharecroppers and the accident that cost him his leg at age 12, his life easily could have been one of anonymity, but Bates had an extraordinary spirit and resilience that led him to a life of renown. And he did not take that for granted. He danced

before the accident and taught himself how to dance on the wooden prosthetic leg made by his uncle. Bates was largely self-taught, having only one “official” lesson from Bojangles Robinson, the famed tap dancer. Bates traveled the world, dancing for audiences of all sizes and people of all statuses, from royalty to soldiers wounded in battle and beyond.

Being a Black performer in the Jim Crow era was not easy. His earnings were much less than his counterpart white performers, lodgings could be hard to come by, and venue owners felt free to change the rules. Bates even performed in blackface in Washington, DC, because Blacks were not allowed on stage. You read that right, a Black man had to wear blackface to hide his race to perform on stage in Washington, DC. At one point he was at Grossinger’s, the famed Catskills resort, looked out at the audience, turned, and said to his brother, “There is no one out there that looks like us.” And, thus began the creation story of the Peg Leg Bates Resort.

In 1951, he bought a 71-acre former turkey farm in Accord, New York, which became the resort. At various times, it was called a resort and/or a casino. Each time he tried to name the place, there was

opposition from outsiders (perhaps, by other resort owners and town officials) to calling it whatever he had landed on. It might have been a not-so-subtle attempt to prevent the resort from operating. Yet, open it he did. It was an interracial resort, but the clientele was largely Black for the overnight stays and the Saturday and Sunday day visit crowds. There was more diversity at the nightclub in the evenings, just for the dinner and show.

There were several ways to stay at the resort—from weeklong visits to stays of several days to the Saturday or Sunday visit. On any given weekend day, dozens of buses would travel from New York City to the resort for day trips. For a modest cost, people could enjoy everything the resort offered, including the opportunity to meet Bates and enjoy a floor show before hopping on the bus at the end of the day. For longer stays, people came from far and wide for the all-you-can-eat buffets, the pools, and, of course, the chance to meet Bates and see the nightly performance by Miss René Bailey and the band. During the off-season, Bates and his band would travel from New York to his hometown of Greenville, South Carolina, to drum up business for the resort. They would play concerts throughout their travels, bringing the nightclub experience with them.

By all accounts, Bates was an extraordinary man from the childhood accident that shaped his future performing career to the resort to his community work. He was consistently aware of his role within the communities and cultures to which he belonged. “One of the more useful civilian jobs in this war is being done, we believe, by Peg-Leg Bates, the one-legged colored dancer who has spent much of his time visiting Army and Navy hospitals and camps, demonstrating to the boys that the loss of a limb is no cause for despair” (Ross 1943, 19). Bates was always willing to talk to any individual or group about keeping a positive attitude and not giving in to despair.

He had an astute and intimate understanding of the financial situations forced upon Black performers and audiences. He



Gravesite of Peg Leg Bates. Photo by the author.

Peg Leg Bates Resort

I built it for you, now enjoy it with me.

OUR CAPACITY-DOUBLE OCCUPANCY: 210

KERHONKSON, NY 12446 • 914-626-3781

WEEK END CONSISTS OF:

- Half Of Balance Of Monies Due On Groups, Plus Guest List Due Two Weeks Prior To Arrival
- Double Occupancy Required In All Rooms
- Must Have A Minimum Of 30 Guests To Receive Group Rate
- No Personal Checks Accepted
- No Deposit Returned
- Full Payment Upon Arrival
- Buffet On Check-In Nite, Upon Request, \$8.75 Each (Tax Included)

FACILITIES:
Disc Roller Skating, Tennis, Volleyball, Basketball, Ping Pong, & Bikes-Rental
Swimming Pools, Horse Shoes, Hiking & Jogging Trail, Etc.
Conference Rooms, Meeting Rooms And Work Shops

TRAILERS: 3 Bedrooms, Living Room, Bath, T.V., Excellent For Family And Friends

FOR SINGLE OCCUPANCY, Regular Rate Plus One Half, Per Person

YOUR MID-WEEK GETAWAY MONDAY THRU THURSDAY

Just think, you and your group arrive Monday 4:30 p.m. and stay through Thursday for the low, low price of \$154.39, plus 7% New York State tax and a 10% gratuity for a total of \$180.64 per person.

MID WEEK CONSISTS OF: Monday night sleeping, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, Continental Breakfast (served in your room), plus a Big Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner served in the main dining room.

For your entertainment: Tuesday night is Movie Night, Wednesday Night is our Big Show and Dance, then for Thursday Dinner time, we have a Chuck Wagon Barbecue served around our pool.

There are many activities including Basketball, Volleyball, Horsehoes, Ping Pong, Badminton, Tennis, Disc Roller Skating, Swimming Pools, Jogging & Hiking Trails, with a Golf Course and Horseback Riding near by.

There is also a Laundromat for your convenience. For this special price a group must have a guarantee of thirty (30) persons, but we can handle up to two hundred (200). A deposit of \$30.00 per person is required within three (3) weeks after reservations are made, or otherwise specified and then two (2) weeks prior to arrival, we require your guest list, (2 in each room), plus one half of your balance. Final payment is due on night of arrival.

You'll love our place, enjoy our food, applaud our entertainment. You will have fun! I personally guarantee it.

1. Friday Nite Sleeping Only
2. Friday Nite Disco
3. Continental Breakfast Served In Your Room Saturday Morning
4. Full Breakfast And Dinner Saturday Served In Dining Room
5. Live Variety Show & Dancing Saturday Nite
6. Full Breakfast And Dinner Served Sunday In Dining Room
7. No Continental On Sunday

MID WEEK CONSISTS OF:

1. Monday Nite Sleeping Only
2. Monday Nite Disco
3. Continental Breakfast, Full Breakfast & Dinner, Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday
4. Tuesday Nite Movie
5. Live Variety Show & Dancing Wednesday Nite
6. Chuck Wagon Bar-B-Que Dinner Around Pool Thursday

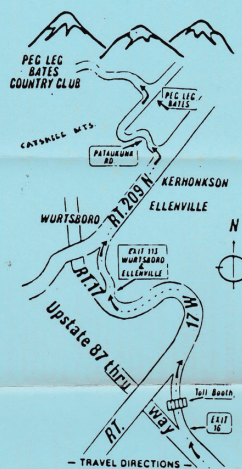
\$30.00 Per Person Deposit Required Within Three Weeks After Reservations Are Made.

We Will Have Fun! I Personally Guarantee It.

By the way

PEG-LEG BATES

KERHONKSON, N.Y. 12446



TRAVEL DIRECTIONS

To Peg Leg Bates Country Club:
VIA CAR - New York State Thruway to Exit 16 - To Route 17 West to Exit 112 - into Route 209 North - continue on Route 209 into Kerhonkson - Follow signs to Peg Leg Bates Country Club
VIA BUS SHORTLINE Port Authority Bus Terminal 41st St. and 8th Ave. New York City to Kerhonkson N.Y. - Our Station Wagon will pick you up
DIRECTIONS TO NY FROM PEG LEG BATES COUNTRY CLUB
VIA CAR - Follow signs to Kerhonkson turn right on Route 209 - into Route 17 - Exit 112 - into N.Y. State Thruway

PEG LEG BATES

Kerhonkson N.Y. 12446

COUNTRY CLUB

1990 SEASON GROUP RATES

(914) 626 3781

WEEKENDERS

Guarantee of 30 people-Double Occupancy
Week-End Check-in 4:30 p.m. Friday thru Dinner 4:30 p.m. Sunday

RATES PER PERSON

	Hotel Accommodations	Trailer Accommodations	7% Sales Tax	Gratuity	Total
	\$154.39	\$140.13	10.31	15.44	\$180.64
			9.31	14.01	\$163.95

MID WEEKERS

Guarantee of 30 people-Double Occupancy
Mid Week Check-in 4:30 p.m. Monday thru Dinner 4:30 p.m. Thursday

RATES PER PERSON

	Hotel Accommodations	Trailer Accommodations	7% Sales Tax	Gratuity	Total
	\$143.61	\$129.25	10.05	14.36	\$168.02
			9.05	12.93	\$151.23

WEEKERS

Guarantee of 30 people-Double Occupancy
Check-in 4:30 Friday thru Dinner 4:30 p.m. Thursday

RATES PER PERSON

	Hotel Accommodations	Trailer Accommodations	7% Sales Tax	Gratuity	Total
	\$308.78	\$287.22	21.62	30.88	\$361.28
			20.11	28.72	\$366.05

\$30 Per Person required on ALL reservations. Groups must bring 30 Guest to get Group Rates.

You must meet QUOTA, or pay INDIVIDUAL RATES.

1. Dinner not included on check in day
2. Delicious Buffet prepared upon request \$8.75 per person.
3. Required deposit MUST be in not later than (3) weeks after reservation is made.

NO DEPOSITS REFUNDED

*They're by Bates by the Pool
Wednesday Night
Monday Night
etc.*

CHILDREN'S RATE
Under 12 years, one (1/2) rate
12 - Over full rate

"PEG LEG" BATES Country Club

TEL: (914) 626-3781

KERHONKSON, NEW YORK 12446

INDIVIDUAL RATES & MOTEL ACCOMMODATION

Rates per person based on double occupancy. Single occupancy, full rate plus one half. All rooms with twin beds, private bath & color T.V. wall to wall carpeting & picture windows with a dramatic scenic view.

	Rate	Tax*	Gratuity	Total
Per Day	\$69.84	\$ 4.89	\$ 6.98	\$ 81.71
Per Weekend	147.79	10.35	14.79	172.93
Per Week	317.64	22.23	31.76	371.63

INDIVIDUAL RATES & TRAILER ACCOMMODATION

Excellent accommodation for families & friends, 4 to 6 people two/three Bedrooms, Living Room with Color T.V., Dining Area & Private shower

	Rate	Tax*	Gratuity	Total
Per Day	\$ 54.29	\$ 3.80	\$ 5.49	\$ 63.58
Per Weekend	143.61	10.05	14.36	168.02
Per Week	294.53	20.62	29.43	344.58

CHILDREN UNDER 12 - HALF PRICE - \$30.00 DEPOSIT PER PERSON REQUIRED ON EACH RESERVATION
NO PERSONAL CHECKS ACCEPTED

RATES REDUCED 10% FROM AFTER LABOR DAY TILL MEMORIAL DAY

RENTALS AVAILABLE ON Roller Skating • Tennis Court • Bicycles

PLEASE NOTE - DAILY CHECK IN - 4:30 p.m. - Dinner not included
DAILY CHECK OUT - 4:00 p.m. - Dinner included

WEEKENDS CHECK IN - 4:30 p.m. - Dinner not included
CHECK OUT - 4:00 p.m. - Dinner included
Rooms must be vacated by 4:00 p.m.

ALL RATES INCLUDE THREE MEALS DAILY Continental Breakfast served in your room; Main Breakfast and Dinner served in Dining Room

*7% NEW YORK STATE TAX

PLEASE CALL FOR RESERVATIONS - (914) 626

PEG LEG BATES

Kerhonkson N.Y. 12446

COUNTRY CLUB

PLEASE CALL FOR RESERVATIONS - (914) 626-3781

DAY PICNICS & BUS OUTINGS

OPEN ALL SEASONS

WE CAN HANDLE UP TO FORTY BUSES

(No Buses Allowed on the Premises Until 12 Noon)

FREE PARKING 12 NOON TO 6:00 P.M.

Admission \$5.00 per person - 7% Sales Tax = \$5.35¢
\$100.00 DEPOSIT REQUIRED per bus load
(+7% Tax \$7.00 = \$107.00 per bus)



WE ARE NEVER RAISED OUT



FACILITIES CONSIST OF ...
• Swimming Pool • Table Tennis
• Basketball • Badminton
• Volleyball • Bar & Blue Pills
Change rooms with showers for men and women.

EXTRA! EXTRA! WE HAVE ADDED A NEW PATIO RESTAURANT TO OUR NEW PICNIC AREA!
Featuring ...
• Open Pit Barbecue Spare Ribs
• Open Pit Barbecue Chicken
• Hot Buttered Corn On The Cob
• Potato Salad, Cole Slaw
• Hot & Cold Beverages
Plus Many Other Goodies!

DEPOSIT REQUIRED TO HOLD DATE. (Deposits must be in within three (3) weeks after reservation date is made)

NO DEPOSITS REFUNDED

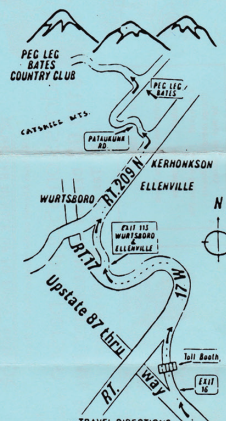
NO PERSONAL CHECKS ACCEPTED

PROMOTERS MUST COME IMMEDIATELY TO OFFICE UPON ARRIVAL

*ANYONE ARRIVING BY CAR - ADMISSION FEE. Adults \$5.00 per person - children \$3.00 per child under 12 years

PEG-LEG BATES

KERHONKSON, N.Y. 12446



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learned at an early age to be careful with his money, enabling him to save enough to open the resort in the mid-1950s. As stated before, he wanted to see Black people enjoy the Catskills in the way white people of all cultures did.

He was keenly aware of the effect that the Civil Rights Movement and integration would have on Black-owned businesses. It was a bittersweet prospect that he knew was coming, that once Blacks could go any place they wanted, they would start going to resorts that offered more amenities. He understood that this progress meant the end of his time as a resort owner.

I always like to end my ruminations about Bates with this story told to me by a member of the Samsonville United Methodist Church. Bates used to visit a veteran who had also lost his leg. They would sit on the porch chatting for a while, and then they would get up and dance. ▼

Reference

Ross, Harold W., ed. 1943. "Talk of the Town." *New Yorker* November 20, 19–20. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1943/11/20/peg-leg-bates>.



Elinor Levy is a public folklorist, originally from Oakland, California. She recently left Arts Mid-Hudson and is now pursuing her third act as artist and a folklorist. It is a privilege to bring the legacy of "Peg Leg" Bates to the public. Photo courtesy of the author.

Submission Guidelines for *Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore*

Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore is dedicated to publishing the content of folklore in the words and images of its creators and practitioners. The journal publishes research-based articles, written in an accessible style, on topics related to traditional art and life. It also features stories, interviews, reminiscences, essays, folk poetry and music, photographs, and artwork, drawn from people in all parts of New York State. Columns on subjects such as photography, sound and video recording, legal and ethical issues, and the nature of traditional art and life appear in each issue. We encourage contributions of original articles, news items, photographs, and any other materials relating to folklore and folklife in New York State for possible inclusion in *Voices*.

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Articles published in *Voices* represent original contributions to folklore studies. Although *Voices* emphasizes the folklore of New York State, the editor welcomes articles based on the folklore of any area of the world, especially if it relates to some aspect of life in New York State. Articles on the theory, methodology, and geography of folklore are also welcome, as are purely descriptive articles on the ethnography of folklore. In addition, *Voices* provides a home for "orphan" tales, narratives, and songs, whose contributors are urged to provide contextual information.

Authors are encouraged to include short personal reminiscences, anecdotes, isolated tales, narratives, songs, and other material that relates to and enhances their main article.

Typically, feature articles range from 1,000 to 4,000 words and up to 6,000 words at the editor's discretion.

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Books, recordings, films, videos, exhibitions, concerts, and the like are selected for review in *Voices* for their relevance to folklore studies or the folklore of New York State and their potential interest to a wide audience. Persons wishing to review recently published material should contact the editor at tdegarmo@sals.edu. Unsolicited reviews and proposals for reviews will be evaluated by the editor and by outside referees where appropriate. Reviews should not exceed 750 words.

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Short but substantive reactions to or elaborations upon material appearing in *Voices* within the previous year are welcomed. The editor may invite the author of the materials being addressed to respond; both pieces may be published together. Any subject may be addressed or rebutted once by any correspondent. The principal criteria for publication are whether, in the opinion of the editor or the editorial board, the comment constitutes a substantive contribution to folklore studies, and

whether it will interest our general readers. Letters should not exceed 500 words

Style

The journal follows *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Consult *Merriam Webster's College Dictionary* for questions of spelling, meaning, and usage, and avoids gender-specific terminology. It is also available online at <https://www.merriam-webster.com>.

Footnotes

Endnotes and footnotes should be avoided; incorporate such information into the text if possible. Endnotes can be included minimally, at editor's discretion. Ancillary information may be submitted as a sidebar.

Bibliographic Citations

For citations of text from outside sources, use the author-date style, described in *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Language

All material must be submitted in US English. Foreign language terms (transliterated, where appropriate, into the Roman alphabet) should be italicized.

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Folk Artists Self-Management Project
Folk Archives Project
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Advocacy
A Public Voice

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\$100.00	Harold W. Thompson Circle
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\$100.00	Partner
\$150.00	Edith Cutting Folklore in Education

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