

Annual Report of Greene County Historian

Submitted by Jonathan Palmer

Introduction:

This is my first Annual Report submitted as Greene County Historian for the term covering the period 1/1/2021 to 1/1/2022. This reporting period was defined largely by pandemic-related restrictions and resulted in the curtailment of potential public programming and in-person reference work. During this reporting period I have had regular interactions with roughly half of the municipal historians working in the fourteen towns and five villages that comprise Greene County.

Lectures and Presentations:

I gave one talk to the On-Ti-Ora Chapter, DAR and one talk to the Fortnightly Club of Catskill during the period of this annual report over Zoom. Those presentations comprised discussions with chapter and club members on some of the ongoing work of our County Historical Society, and also served as lengthy question and answer sessions where attendees asked me questions on local history and sought tips for research and resources.

I gave two cemetery tours this past year and one neighborhood walking tour. The Cemetery Tours were in Catskill Village Cemetery and Athens Rural/Mount Hope Cemetery and drew a total of roughly 100 attendees (these are cool cemeteries). The neighborhood walking tour was given for the benefit of Cultivate Catskill, a local organization responsible for maintaining parks and plantings in the Village of Catskill. The walk was offered twice in one day and took attendees through a historic neighborhood. There were roughly 80 attendees.

My last presentation was given on behalf of Greene Land Trust, a local partner of Scenic Hudson, and was held outdoors at their campus on the historic Brandow Farm in Athens. This presentation was a simple discussion of the history of that campus and drew roughly 50 attendees who patiently stood out in the cold listening to me talk for thirty minutes. Mark Peckham was a joint presenter who discussed the architecture of the home.

Total Attendees for public events and lectures: 250 (approximate)

Public Interactions and Reference Assistance:

This past year I have continued my involvement with the research conducted by Debra Bruno on the history and legacy of Slavery in New York State with a specific focus on her family and the historic region now comprising Greene County. This research is subsequent to the work already done that culminated in her article on slavery which appeared in Washington Post Magazine in 2020.

I've been busy this year finally acquainting myself with resources in the Greene County Clerk's Office and the Greene County Real Property and Tax Services Office. This has been fruitful as I continue to build a stronger sense of the historic government records at my disposal.

I assisted this past summer with an inquiry from Bill Cross, a Winslow Homer scholar, who came to Greene County to study the environs of Palenville in an effort to place the location of some famous illustrations and paintings Homer made in the 1870s. He and I spent the day driving around Palenville and Kaaterskill Clove, and I subsequently identified the location of a mill and bridge shown in Homer's "The Morning Bell/Old Mill."

At the end of 2021 I worked alongside Julian Icher of the Lafayette Trail, Inc., to get approval for the placement of a commemorative marker honoring the 1824 visit of the Marquis de Lafayette to Catskill. This will be placed in the coming year.

In the Summer of 2021 I dedicated a Roadside History Marker in the hamlet of West Kill, Lexington, Greene County, commemorating the work of photography pioneer Rev. Levi Hill, who invented a color photographic process while minister of the West Kill Baptist Church in the late 1840s and early 1850s.

I had the pleasure to attend the dedication of the History Marker for Camp Jened/"Crip Camp" which was a summer camp for disabled people and the subject of a recent documentary. The marker was prepared and dedicated by the board and volunteers of the Mountain Top Historical Society with former counselors and campers in attendance.

I had the pleasure to also attend two cemetery restoration workshops offered by community organizations in Durham and Palenville which brought in members of the public to hear talks on the best practices of gravestone cleaning and maintenance while also giving them hands-on practice. The Palenville event, offered by Palenville: The Hamlet and the Behr family also incorporated an educational component in which QR codes were placed near historic internments and left for a period of weeks so that members of the public could go to the cemetery on their own time, scan QR codes, and read historical narratives concerning the history of Palenville as it related to specific burials.

I assisted approximately thirty new homeowners and residents with inquiries concerning house history research and general local history reference questions. These inquiries sometimes result in one-on-one appointments, while others are simply opportunities to teach community members about resources on local history which have been made available to them either through in-person visits to historical associations or online through digital repositories.

Scholarship/Publications:

This past year I completed 35 articles on local history which were submitted to The Catskill Daily Mail, The Mountain Eagle/Windham Weekly, and Porcupine Soup (an all-online local paper). These articles are freely available for the public to read through Porcupine Soup without paywalls. The Mountain Eagle is a paper of record for the County, and the Daily Mail is the traditional venue for publications by Greene County Historians. Articles are occasionally picked up by the Register Star of Columbia County as well. I receive no compensation for these articles other than what I am paid by the County as a public historian.

Attached are articles published during the 2021-2022 reporting period as they appeared in the free online newspaper *Porcupine Soup*.



November 28, 2020

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The Noon-Mark

By Jonathan Palmer

Archivist and Deputy Greene County Historian

A noon-mark is a traditional method used to track the passage of time.

I've been all bent out of shape trying to come up with a title for this newly inaugurated column, and now that I've finally arrived at one I have little doubt most of you are thinking "... that's it?? It took you two weeks to come up with that?" — my reply to which is simply "yeah."

Like anyone faced with a vexing problem I sought sage counsel, but when I mentioned to my own mother that I had no clue what to call this prospective weekly feature she insightfully declared "You could call it 'Fresh from the Jon.'" While allusions to the toilet probably don't set the right tone I have little doubt that her kind suggestion was probably an apt one, though I leave it to you all to be the final judge of this. I only ask that you make the determination of this feature's worth after a few issues and then decide if it should be carried on or canned.

So what the heck is a noon-

mark? Truth be told I had never heard of one until about a week ago. I was up late reading "Old Times in Windham" by the Rev. Henry Hedges Prout, and stumbled across his reminiscence of an age before any of the earliest settlers of Windham had a clock among them to tell time. As a generally industrious lot of people it was still useful to track the passage of the day, so in lieu of a clock a tool called a noon-mark was employed.

Here's how noon-marks work — In a sunny window of a cabin a gouge would be carved at the edge of a shadow cast by a fixed object when the sun was at its highest point in the sky. This gouge could then be used day by day to find a rough approximate of noon... as the shadow approached the mark it was the forenoon, and as it moved beyond the mark it was the afternoon.

Naturally, a noon-mark is only most accurate during the season it is carved, so I suspect these settlers probably had a



The ruins of a settler's cabin in Jewett bear mute testament to the passage of time. It was in a cabin such as this that Reverend Prout described the noon-mark on a windowsill as a small but important piece of the domestic scene. Palmer Photo.

summertime noon-mark and a wintertime one to account for the shifting of the sun's position in the sky. While the noon-mark was doubtlessly primitive, it certainly sufficed to help track the day, and the people of that time were none the worse for wear through its use.

History, like the noon-mark, is an imprecise thing. The passage of time makes the exact recollection of many things impossible, and we are forever trying to track our own progress as a people by the veiled memory of the past. History then is really just a noon-mark

for a different scale of time, and I suspect Rev. Prout would have agreed with my analogy.

I have no idea what this column will hold in store. I don't aim to make it "all history, all the time" and certainly don't have the ability to guarantee you'll see it every week, but I do promise it will be the best I can muster. In the meantime I highly recommend you find a copy of Prout's "Old Times in Windham" and give it a read.

Questions and observations can be directed to Jon Palmer via archivist@gchistory.org

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December 7, 2020

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The Noon-Mark

A noon-mark is a traditional method used to track the passage of time

By Deputy Greene County Historian Jonathan Palmer

Historian droppings

Much like the horse, historians leave droppings. Ours are allegedly more useful than our equine counterparts, but the horse is quite fortunate that on most mornings someone comes by to shovel the stables out. Once a stall is mucked those droppings get put to good use as manure in fields and gardens — fertilizing a season's harvest with what a horse makes naturally from last year's hay.

Optimistically I conjecture that "historian droppings" fertilize the minds of those who deign to read what we write. For better or worse the stuff we churn out invariably rings a bell with someone or gets someone curious enough to study further of their own accord. The problem is that, once our articles are deposited, nobody comes by in the morning to clean up the aftermath. My writing this article is all well and good, but once its read and done with it lands on a stratified pile of "history stuff" which really hasn't been cleaned or straightened up since 1927.

All of this was precipitated by a search I made for one of Ron Gabriele's invaluable history articles published in the *Daily Mail* concerning local movie theaters. I needed to know how long the Hi-Way Drive-In has been open (4 May 1951 by his account), but without my knowing that he had already written on the subject I would have never been able to find the article of my own accord. In other words I wouldn't have thought to look for something I was unaware existed.

This is far from the first time I've contemplated this issue. The list of historians appointed by the County, municipalities, and otherwise is formidable in length, and the number of articles and columns they've penned is of a truly monumental scale. I'll be the first to admit that I haven't the foggiest idea what 90% of those articles are about, and If I neither know how to find these articles nor what they contain... well then what good are they? If a historian doesn't write for posterity then they ought not write at all! Clearly we are a pretty optimistic bunch.



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founder of the
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associate, is actively buying gold
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December 7, 2020

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This isn't to say that those who have preceded us didn't do their due diligence, nor am I saying that what has been written previously is not deserving of being revisited - the issue is just that the horse's accommodations seem to be cleaned more regularly than the historian's. To continue the metaphor — what local historians need is a stablehand to get things neatened up.

On a shelf at the Vedder rest several packed 3-inch binders containing the complete run of Ray Beecher's column *Greene County Gleanings*. I personally find those old columns remarkably helpful sometimes, as they contain trivia and notes about collection items at the historical society, important events and goings-on, and sometimes a cool story I was otherwise unfamiliar with. The difference between Ray's column and his successor David Dorpfeld's *Greene History Notes* is that I can't just go and ask Ray any longer whether he recalled writing about something at one point. With Dave it's another story - he can go into his binders and fish something out pretty much on demand.

And so I have become Ray Beecher's stableboy. On the Vedder Research Library's website, which I very cleverly named "vedderresearchlibrary.org" under the "Reference" menu heading is a sub-menu called "Digitized Publications" - within that section you can find where I have begun to upload Ray Beecher's articles one by one under the year they were published. Its time consuming work, as I have been coming up with descriptive titles for his otherwise title-free column... plus I'm not going to do all that work without actually reading each one. Small wonder that I've only completed up to the 1995/1996 section of the webpage, clearly it'll be a while before I've done up to 2008.

If you want to view them quickly you can use this URL without clicking through all the menus I listed above: <https://vedderresearchlibrary.org/gc-gleanings> — and now you know what historian droppings look like once they've been shoveled out.

Questions and observations can be directed to Jon Palmer via archivist@gchistory.org

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March 12, 2021

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The Noon-Mark

By Jonathan Palmer
Greene County Historian

*A noon-mark is a traditional method
used to track the passage of time*

This week's image is an unusual one which comes to us from the digital collections of the New York Public Library. I was clued into the existence of this image by a friend across the river who saw a bound collection of these prints up for auction on Ebay. The Greene County Historical Society didn't try to bid on the eBay listing, but I was able to find this print online to satisfy our curiosity!

This view of Middle Ground Flats, Athens, and Hudson comes to us from a work by Jacques Gerard Milbert first published in Paris in 1828 titled: "Itineraire Pittoresque du Fleuve Hudson et des Parties Latérales de l'Amérique du Nord."

Within the three-volume set are 54 lithographed views of the Hudson River Valley. I found this particular view of note for one reason - it may be the earliest view available of the ferry cut or "canal" that was dug through Middle Ground Flats for the benefit of the Hudson-Athens Ferry in 1818. The canal was less than a decade old at the time the scene was composed, and shows a steam-powered ferry using the cut.

At Athens today one can still spy the remnants of this canal from the Riverfront Park by spotting where the thinnest region of tree growth is on the now heavily wooded flats.

The steam ferry was an interesting inclusion by the artist, because Athens wouldn't receive its first steam ferry until the 1850s. Perhaps the person composing the scene thought a steam ferry would convey a better sense of the progress and affluence that was on display in the Hudson Valley at that time.

What the artist would have actually seen was a "Team Boat" powered by several horses on treadmills which plied the same stretch of water.

The scene itself is composed from somewhere



"View of the Hudson and the Catskill Mountains" by Jacques Gerard Milbert from the Digital Collections of the New York Public Library.

near Promenade Hill in Hudson at the end of Warren Street, and I find the artist's inclusion of some Hudsonians having a leisurely picnic to be a very interesting feature of the scene.

These well-dressed folks were part of an affluent up and coming merchant class that called Hudson and Athens home in the 1820s, and they are no doubt picnicking in a spot where they can look out on a scene they had financial interest in. Perhaps one or two of the picnickers may have owned some of the ships sailing the river, while others on this picnic profited from trade of the goods being carried in their holds.

It's really quite a lot to think about when one considers that the artist demonstrates to the viewer that even in their leisure time these Hudsonians are realizing a profit. The stirring scenery, bustling traffic, carefree populace, and the composition and variety of buildings and homes all create quite a statement about what the United States was in the 1820s. The more I consider the scene the more I admire its execution.

*Questions and comments can be directed
to Jon via archivist@gchistory.org.*



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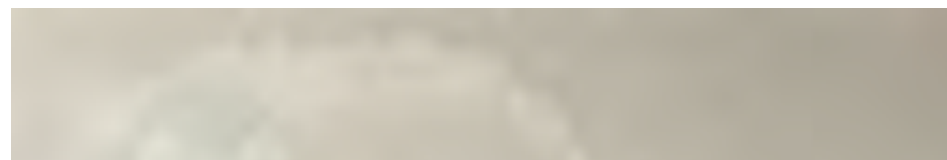
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The Noon-Mark

A noon-mark is a traditional method used to track the passage of time



used to track the passage of time

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
March 23, 2021

How Mrs. Boice saved the news

This photo may not seem like a suitable image for Women's History Month, but I was compelled to share it having recently digitized an oral history audio cassette interview featuring none other than the late Betty Boice of Catskill.

Mrs. Boice, as many of you will recall, was a fixture at the Catskill Daily Mail for nearly fifty years of that paper's existence, and in that time tirelessly operated both behind the scenes in daily operations as well as in the role of a reporter.

Others will recall her as a founder of the Catskill Fortnightly Club. Indeed, she wore many hats, though some might be surprised to hear that a few days before this picture was taken she also nearly assumed the role of a firefighter.

In the mid-20th century the building shown in this photo hosted the offices of the Catskill Daily Mail and the Examiner Recorder. Originally constructed as the



This photo was taken by Betty Jean Poole, Athens Village Historian Emeritus, a few weeks after the fire while standing on the steps of the Greene

the Examiner-Recorder. Originally constructed as the Mott and Gaylord Opera House in the 1870s, a fire in the early morning hours of January 29, 1951 destroyed the upper two floors of the portion occupied by the Daily Mail and spread into the Examiner-Recorder's adjoining spaces destroying the top floor there.

The Daily Mail had its print shop on Hill Street, but all of the vital business and account books were stored in a safe in the opera house building's basement.

In the midst of the raging fire, as firefighters from Catskill and Hudson showered the upper floors with thousands of gallons of water, Betty Boice elbowed her way through the crowd and rushed into the burning building for the Daily Mail's business books. The structure threatened collapse from the weight of the water being poured into its upper stories. Despite this she successfully rescued all the account books in several trips, being the only employee besides the owner who knew the combination to the safe.

The Daily Mail made its print deadline for that Monday and Tuesday, and no accounts of the fire made mention of her heroics to save the Daily Mail from flames.

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The Noon-Mark

A noon-mark is a traditional method used to track the passage of time

used to track the passage of time

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
March 30, 2021

Alvena Hitchcock

Alvena Hitchcock passed away this month at the formidable age of 103. Her obituary was an unwelcome sight when Patricia Morrow posted it on Facebook, because somewhere deep down I had the faint hope that one day I would have the chance to meet her. Instead, this Women's History Month marks the passage of a remarkable woman, and we are diminished by her departure. East Jewett has lost one of its matriarchs.

She came up in conversation at work the same day I read the news. Larry Tompkins, unknowingly mirroring her obituary, immediately remarked on his memories of seeing her seated next to the immaculate antique wood-fired Glenwood Stove in her kitchen. Mrs. Hitchcock's obituary spoke of her sitting beside it reading her mother's diaries. Larry and I contemplated in conversation the thought of her cleaning and keeping that wood cook stove burning well into her twilight years - a remarkable feat in and of itself.

That stove was not Mrs. Hitchcock's defining feature, but it was an apt symbol of what she embodied. Over the years she assumed the roles of scholar, musician,



The stove was not Mrs. Alvena Hitchcock's defining feature, but it was an apt symbol of what she embodied.



the years she assumed the roles of scholar, musician, historian, community volunteer, mother, and wife - fulfilling the responsibilities entailed by each while at the same time carrying forward memories of the Mountain Top as she knew it a century ago. Through her those bygone days were still alive for all of us, stoked to life every time she put a log in the Glenwood stove and recollected to a neighbor the memories of their departed forebears. Those forebears and ancestors were people she had known in life, and they endured for those neighbors in her spoken recollections much the same way Mrs. Hitchcock's mother endured for her through those old diaries. I'd like to think Alvena Hitchcock understood the responsibility Time had bestowed on her and that she relished the importance of it.

Women's History Month as I knew it growing up didn't celebrate women like Mrs. Hitchcock. In school we read about historical figures like Susan B. Anthony, Harriet Tubman, Amelia Earhart, and Nellie Bly to name just a few - but our grandmothers, mothers, and sisters were not on that list; our family, neighbors, and teachers weren't part of the curriculum. Perhaps this nuanced understanding was a bit much to expect from an elementary schooler, but that doesn't mean we can't strive now to reconcile that dissonance.

I have no doubt the list each of us could make for our revised Women's History Months would be formidable in scale. My own would start with family, but it grows quickly to include a multitude of neighbors, friends, coworkers, mentors, and predecessors in my given

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coworkers, mentors, and predecessors in my given profession as an historian and archivist. The domain of local history in particular is populated with countless women chroniclers whose silent work collecting, preserving, and interpreting our community heritage goes unacknowledged with alarming frequency.

The scrapbook collections of the Vedder Library are a prime example of this. Cataloged and partially indexed, you can find wonderful bits of trivial information and anecdotes scattered among their crumbling pages. However, no catalog description fully explains that each volume is really a curated exhibit compiled by a local woman with an eye for posterity. Within a single scrapbook's pages, we get to experience the communities and lives of these often unnamed chroniclers as they saw fit to document in their time. What I mean to say is that by opening the pages of these crumbling tomes we modern observers get to have a conversation with these women again, reading of the past they quietly clipped from newspapers and interpreting their work for the present.

The scrapbook collections are only one small portion of the vast contributions women have made to the documentary heritage of this county. The Vedder Library itself, named for our first County Historian Jessie Van Vechten Vedder, serves as an indelible reminder of her monumental efforts - foremost being that she set a bar so high many of her successors, myself included, can only look on in awe in lieu of surpassing her achievements. And then, of course,

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surpassing her achievements. And then of course there are some books resting on a shelf in the opposite aisle from our scrapbook collections; several histories by the late Elwood Hitchcock regaling us with bygone days of the Mountain Top. Alvena Hitchcock, Elwood's wife, typed all his books up from notes during her free time in preparation for the publishers. Here's to the memory of Alvena Hitchcock sitting beside her old Glenwood stove on this Women's History Month.

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The Noon-Mark

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By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
April 6, 2021

Road building in Lexington

This week features a postcard image of a road crew working in Lexington, probably circa 1905-1910. I'm not sure exactly where in Lexington this was - a more astute eye than mine might be able to place the location exactly using the house and landscape in the background for reference.

This road building crew is hard at work using a rock crusher to pulverize stone piled up at the left. The pulverized stone would then be carted off by wheelbarrow for use nearby on a new roadbed. The stationary steam engine powering the operation at the right is surrounded by rough cut logs used for fuel.

Of note is the large spark arrestor attached to the smokestack of the engine - perhaps this was added out of concern because of dry spring or summer conditions? A clue like this certainly calls to mind what must have been a hot sunny day.

Winter in the mountains, harsh by all accounts, is particularly cruel to roads. Scenes like this must have been common across the mountain top in the spring and summer months as crews worked by hand to



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...and common means of stream crossing by road to repair seasonal damage where swollen streams, landslides, and thaw had destroyed or upended the roadbed.

That the scene was relatively common makes this postcard image more special, as it is most often the routine surroundings of our lives that we fail to document for posterity.

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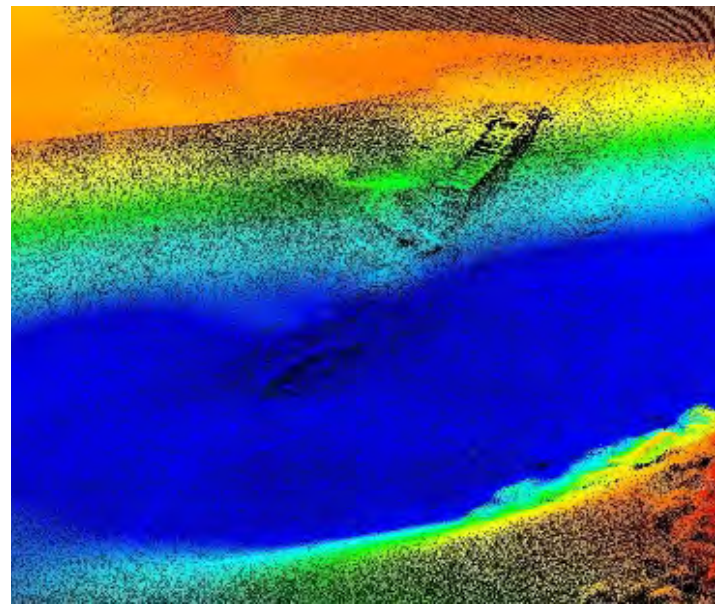
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readers might fondly recall my August

Readers might fondly recall my August article in the Daily Mail about the Hudson-house. In it I featured some important facts folks should know about this excellent site, including some alarming facts about the lighthouse's aging foundations. If most of you didn't follow my advice to put that article to hang on your fridge. While I don't have space on your refrigerators might be a little tight, I feel we ought to circle back to this topic and show the new and fascinating graphics are now available to illustrate. Who doesn't love a cool picture?

The Hudson-Athens Lighthouse and its non-profit preservation society (HALPS), are now in year two of fundraising efforts as one of the recipients of the "Seven to Watch" award awarded them by the Preservation Society of New York State. This increased publicity has raised public awareness towards threatened historic sites across New York, and our iconic lighthouse deserves such attention. Despite the fact that the Hudson-Athens Lighthouse is sitting on something between 170 and 200 years of pilings driven into the river bottom in 1872. Years under water some of these pilings have been damaged by the elements and natural erosion. It was a goal of HALPS to seek funding to support the evaluation of these pilings and to map the river bottom so they could begin stabilization work.

Included with this article is part of that mission. Using scanning equipment, a survey was taken to provide HALPS with a clear picture of what is underwater around the Lighthouse. The graphics have illustrated how much of the stone is still in place to protect the lighthouse and how much erosion of the river is occurring around the foundation itself. It is a surprise to everyone that this survey also revealed a mysterious structure to the southwest of the lighthouse in what is called the "Athens Channel." This structure, which was found totally by accident,



This image shows a section of the bottom of the Hudson River surrounding the Hudson-Athens Lighthouse. The lighthouse is at the bottom right, and a mysterious structure is visible at the center of the image lying on an underwater surface. Image courtesy of HALPS.

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what is likely the remains of an unknown washed out of the muddy river bottom been encased for well over a century.

en this wreck came to be on the bottom on at Athens is likely a mystery that will ed, but it is a fascinating window into the heritage of our area. In the 19th century subsequently wooden barges dominated business on the Hudson, moving d goods and agricultural products Erie Canal and New York City. Engineless as these were relatively simple to d in the case of barges a float of several be lashed together and towed by a single at efficiently and economically regardless currents. As working vessels these cargo e used season after season until they io rotten to repair, at which point owners imes abandon them on the riverbank to ce its course. Even today the skeletons of an craft can be seen peeking out of the ie shore at low tide. Because of the ever-ire of the river bottom it is far less ind one of these wrecks in twenty feet of eds of feet from shore.

y of this wreck aside, the underwater e Lighthouse revealed alarming scouring ents. Rip rap continues to shift away and of the structure's wooden foundations. i remains unchecked there is a possibility se may someday collapse into the river. in the midst of assessing the best course stabilize and increase the longevity of oundations, and the most intensive and pects of this project are on the horizon. o date on news of the Lighthouse visit slighthouse.org.

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The Noon-Mark

A noon-mark is a traditional method used to track the passage of time

used to track the passage of time

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
April 20, 2021

How old are Greene County's oldest cemeteries?

A recent and ongoing project at the Vedder Library has been the overhauling of our photographic collections—putting images in new sleeves and boxes, assigning identifying numbers to each image, and updating descriptions in a spreadsheet.

During the process we stumbled across this rather odd snapshot of a gravestone that was pulled from the fieldstone foundations of a Houghtaling family barn which once stood above Four Mile Point at Klinkenberg in the Town of Coxsackie. Written in Dutch, it commemorated the passing of an eleven-year-old child in 1752. When George Houghtaling built his new barn at Klinkenberg in the 19th century the stone was likely one of many inconspicuous pieces of fieldstone gathered up to form its foundations. Its rediscovery several decades ago sheds some light on the whereabouts of an early colonial graveyard which has since been lost to time.

Most extant graveyards and cemeteries in Greene County don't date too much earlier than the 1790s with a few choice exceptions. Though Europeans have lived in this region since the 1650s a number of factors including burial customs, settlement patterns, and changes in the



This is the very traditionally styled slate marker of Amos Rice in the Jewett Heights Cemetery. It bears a winged soul effigy in the tradition of older New England gravestones.

burial customs, settlement patterns, and changes in the treatment of burial sites mean that to find an 18th century stone around here is to observe some of the earliest traces of European colonization.

Older Dutch burial customs, which in New Netherland didn't seem to emphasize the permanent marking of forebear's graves, were gradually supplanted in the 1700s by English customs more in keeping with modern traditions. It is for this reason that (despite their relative significance to this area's history) we have no clue where Pieter Bronck, his son Jan, and his grandson Leendert are buried. They all seemed to have observed longstanding colonial Dutch traditions and left their graves poorly marked while their descendants adopted newer modes.

The graveyard at Klinkenberg, which has been more or less lost to time, was one of the area's oldest. Klinkenberg (and the historic home of the same name) has a traceable history going back to 1670. An early mention of a burial at Klinkenberg comes from the records of the Zion Lutheran Church at Athens. In the church records is noted the burial of Anna Hallenbeck, age 17, in 1711 "at Klinkenberg in the new orchard" with no mention of a stone being placed. Beers' 1884 "History of Greene County, New York" is replete with mention of such early burial grounds—often describing them as being in terrible states of neglect and often invisible to the causal observer. One-Hundred-Forty years later these places are now all but lost to time, overgrown as wood lots and all the stones buried under detritus.

If the paucity of early gravestones is surprising on the one hand I remain entirely baffled by the lack of

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One thing, I remain entirely baffled by the lack of interesting early gravestone artwork. The “yankee migration” to Greene County following the end of the Revolution is a well-known phenomenon to genealogists, but to my knowledge has yet to receive a definitive analysis as an event of cultural significance. Despite an entire generation of New England protestant families migrating to Greene County after the Revolution it appears they did not bring their parent’s burial traditions with them.

While the gravestones of New England are celebrated for their abundance of deaths heads and soul effigy tablet markers, my observation so far is that Greene County on the whole probably has less than ten gravestones in that artistic tradition. Most notable is the grave of Amos Rice in the Jewett Heights Cemetery, which is a classic slate marker with a winged soul effigy from 1794. Likewise, the grave of John Maben in the Lexington Cemetery is a strange hybrid marble tablet with a heavily stylized cherub from 1813. Both men’s families were from Connecticut along with many of their neighbors, but only these two markers seem to reflect the traditions of the place they emigrated from.

As I continue to make more observations, I have no doubt there will be subsequent articles on this topic, and of course anyone with questions or observations should feel free to email me at archivist@gchistory.org.

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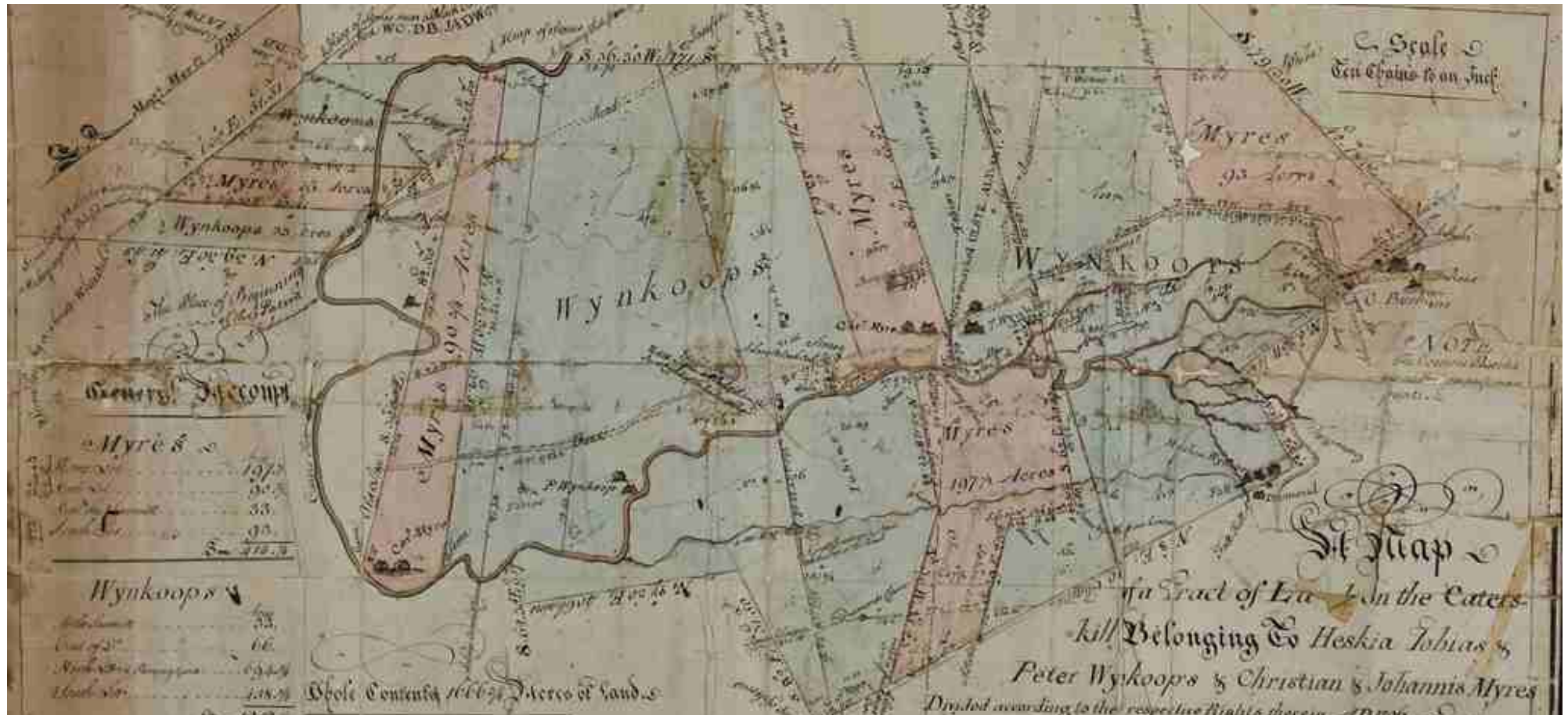
The Noon-Mark

A noon-mark is a traditional method used to track the passage of time

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By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
April 27, 2021

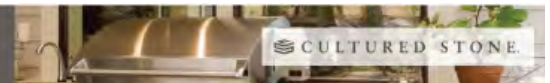
Greene County's oldest cemeteries, part II



This 1796 map of the Myers/Wynkoop tract of land along the Kaaterskill Creek near Palenville shows lands of both family's color coded to denote who owned which sections. A small burying ground is shown in the map owned jointly by both families. Collections of the Vedder Research Library.

Last week I discussed some of the earliest graveyards in Greene County, noting how settlement patterns and burial

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customs can be traced by the prevalence of stones of certain ages and artistic traditions. That is all well and good, but where are those earliest graveyards located? As you might suspect, they are primarily located in the “valley towns” of Catskill, Athens, Coxsackie, and New Baltimore along the shores of the Hudson - the old cemetery at Klinkenberg mentioned in my last article is one of those early locations which exists now primarily in written accounts. We know of burials happening there as early as 1711 thanks to a description in Beers’ 1884 “History of Greene County.”

By contrast, burying grounds like the Overbaugh cemetery on the Embought and the Salisbury cemetery in Leeds which also predate 1750 are well known to us because they were never “lost” like the Klinkenberg graveyard and have been inventoried in the 20th century.

Property surveys of the post-revolutionary period end up being a fascinating place to search for clues concerning other early graveyards. On Route 32 right before the Greene/Ulster line stands a cemetery described in many sources as the Saile-Abeel Cemetery. The name is derived chiefly from the families buried there in the middle and late 19th century. This informal family burial ground can trace its existence back to the earliest years of European settlement in that locale, and first appears on a map of the 1,666-acre “tract of land along the Caters-Kill” owned by the Myers and Wynkoop families. The map dates to 1796, and was likely composed as a reference for lands each family had previously divided amongst themselves. To aid with delineating who owned what the map is color coded: blue sections were owned by Heskia, Tobias, and Peter Wynkoop; red tracts were owned by Christian and Johannes Myers. Even the little burying ground is marked out and color coded. The Salie-Abeel Cemetery therefore seems to be more accurately described as the Myers-Wynkoop Cemetery, as it was marked out in its earliest years for use by those families. Tobias Wynkoop’s burial there is good evidence these places are one

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An equally fascinating early cemetery is described for us in a composite map of the Village of Athens drawn by Caleb Coffin in 1854. Mr. Coffin made a map for reference use which combined four separate early surveys of what became the Village of Athens in 1805. The surveys included in Coffin's map were the John Spoor survey of 1801, the survey of the Conradt Flaack Estate, the survey of Esperanza from circa 1797, and Leonard Bronk's survey of the Glebe Lands of the Zion Lutheran Church. Combined they offer a comprehensive reference for the various lots and surveys described in the earliest deeds for the village.

Included in these surveys are lots marked off with the description "The Lutheran Church Ground" and the "Van Loon Burying Ground" located next to one another along modern South Franklin Street. Today a small grassy knoll with one mysterious gravestone marks the approximate site of these graveyards. Apocryphal tales state that the Van Loon Burying ground is the burial place of Jan Van Loon, original holder of the Loonenburg patent and patriarch of the Van Loon family. If this is more than simply local legend then that graveyard dates at least to the 1740s, but other sources describe Van Loon's original home and burial place as being farther north towards Coxsackie. Despite the evidence from Coffin's map a mystery persists.

On the same map by Caleb Coffin are two other lots on First Street described in the map key as the "Presbyterian Burying Ground." This graveyard, one of three Mr. Coffin included in the map, occupied land which is now included in the boundaries of the Athens Rural Cemetery at the rear of the First Reformed Church.

This clue helps shed some light on the strange conglomeration of graveyards that now comprise Athens Rural Cemetery and

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of graveyards that now comprise Athens Rural Cemetery and Mount Hope Cemetery, and more on these graveyards and the Rural Cemetery Movement will follow next week.

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The Noon-Mark

A noon-mark is a traditional method used to track the passage of time

used to track the passage of time

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
May 4, 2021

One street, five cemeteries





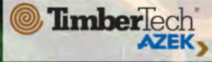

The Caleb Coffin Map of Athens from 1854 which combined four earlier surveys of the Village for simple reference. Zion Lutheran Church Collection, Vedder Research Library.

In last week's article I discussed the locations of some of the earliest graveyards in Greene County. For those of you who patiently waded through the entirety of that piece you may recall I mentioned the 1854 Caleb Coffin map of Athens which showed the early Van Loon family cemetery and Lutheran burying ground shown on South Franklin Street. Including these two lots, there are actually something to the tune of seven distinct burying grounds and cemeteries (not counting the new section of Athens Rural Cemetery) in the village. The other five are on Market Street just up the hill from our friendly neighborhood Stewarts Shop.

We know these cemeteries today as Athens Rural Cemetery and Mount Hope Cemetery, but within these two incorporated cemeteries are traces of earlier graveyards as old as the Village of Athens.

The Rural Cemetery Movement in the United States was an artistic and cultural movement which emphasized the creation of expansive park-like cemeteries managed by private corporations with no affiliation to any church or religious denomination.

These so called "rural" cemeteries, placed on the outskirts of population centers and often designed with sensitivity to aesthetics, began to appear in the Northeast as early as the beginning of the 19th century. Catskill Village Cemetery, a civic cemetery organized by the Catskill Village government, was





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formed in 1811 and is evocative of some aspects of this early trend - folks buried there actually leased their burial lots from the Village on terms of 999 years (in another 800 years there may be some strange evictions).

Following the Rural Cemetery Act of 1847 in New York it became a simple procedure for small civic groups to incorporate and purchase land for the development of rural cemeteries of all sizes across New York State. In Athens the aptly titled Athens Rural Cemetery Association was formed in 1847, and across the street the Mount Hope Cemetery Association was formed in 1849.

Astute observers will note that the internments in Mount Hope and Athens Rural are much older than the 1840s, and that is because necessity dictated these newly incorporated cemetery associations subsume and take over management of several existing burial grounds within their boundaries. Athens Rural clearly has its own nicely laid out sections, but tax maps show that they also own an early and more mysterious cemetery just west of their lots on First Street originally set aside as a "Presbyterian Burying Ground" by John Spoor circa 1801. Athens never had a Presbyterian Church, but the burying ground was clearly used and even may have sported a receiving vault at one time. My own theory is that perhaps congregants from Athens who attended the Presbyterian Church at Hudson may have set a spot aside in the survey which quickly became a burying ground for those not associated with the Episcopal Church - meaning "Presbyterian Burying Ground" may simply have been mere speculation by a few optimistic Presbyterians.

Mount Hope Cemetery of 1849 claims at least two earlier burial grounds within its boundaries - that of the small Society of Friends/Quakers who worshipped in Athens in the 19th century, and the old Trinity Episcopal Church graveyard where many of the Village's founders now rest. These cemeteries are

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many of the village's founders now rest. These cemeteries are easy to delineate simply by the styles and ages of the stones within their boundaries. Surprisingly, the Episcopal Cemetery and post-1849 Mount Hope sections are laid out in relation to the Athens village "grid." At least in the case of the Episcopal buying ground this is somewhat interesting, because older cemeteries around here seem to often observe older customs of placing burials oriented eastward towards the rising sun. That Mount Hope spurns this tradition also is entirely in keeping with the Rural cemetery movement, it being more important to orient the burials in relation to the landscape in the name of aesthetics. It would seem that the early congregants of Trinity Episcopal must have been decidedly civic-minded to be buried in relation to the plan of the community they helped found. The Quaker burial ground, sandwiched between Mount Hope's lots and those of the older Episcopal cemetery, seems to spurn any orientation whatsoever. Those burials, made beneath decidedly austere headstones, appear to be laid out so burials face northeasterly perhaps in an effort to make the most efficient use of the land they allocated.

I'd say three weeks of subjecting readers to graveyard talk is quite enough for the time being, so look forward to something entirely different next week. As always questions and comments can be directed to archivist@gchistory.org.

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The Noon-Mark

A noon-mark is a traditional method used to track the passage of time

used to track the passage of time

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
May 9, 2021

Lexington was the birthplace of color photography

I'm still not over the novelty of receiving roadside history markers in the mail. It's odd to see one of those blue and gold metal signs freshly wrapped in its packaging sitting in a box instead of faded, rusting, and askew on a post at the side of the highway. After many years spent enthusiastically reading these roadside markers it is doubly odd to receive one which has text on it which I wrote.

Is this what historians do? They write roadside markers to trick future generations into liking history? What came first: the historian or the roadside marker?

Philosophical questions about my profession aside, New York State History Markers are no longer a project funded by New York State. Instead, the private William G. Pomeroy Foundation funds the creation of these markers in a yearly application cycle. The process is simple enough, but the Pomeroy foundation requires applicants to give primary sources proving the veracity of proposed marker text. Back in the 1930s when New York State began its program the process wasn't quite as rigorous, and some roadside markers from the '30s offer dubious claims and commemorate rather strange things.

The most curious old marker I've seen is on Route 145 in Preston Hollow and commemorates the town whipping post of all things.

This new marker is only the second one I've done, which makes me a relative newcomer compared with other local



A new Roadside History Marker commemorating the photographic experiments of Levi Hill sits in the Vedder Research Library waiting to be placed in the hamlet of West Kill.

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historians I know. The new marker celebrates the Hillotype, which may be the earliest photographic process in history which authentically captured color for posterity. The Hillotype is named for its inventor Levi Hill, though he himself called his technique "Heliochromy" in a book he wrote on the subject in 1856. Hill experimented with his process at West Kill from the late 1840s into the 1850s, and in 1852 Samuel Morse observed and wrote of Hill's progress to much fanfare. James Maxwell's three-color process, long held to be the first color photographic technique, wasn't proposed until 1855.

The complicated nature of Hill's Process, coupled with his failure to disclose the precise recipe and his tendency to "enhance" certain images with other colors afterwards led his work to be dismissed as a fraud for well over a century. Renewed interest in Hill's work in the 1980s and 1990s by photography experts and the Smithsonian finally determined that his process indeed replicated some true colors at the moment the image was exposed—thus redeeming Levi Hill's legacy and making the hamlet of West Kill in Lexington, New York the birthplace of color photography.

Levi Hill's life is of considerable interest even discounting his pioneering photographic work. Born in Athens, he spent time in the publishing business in Hudson and Kingston as well as New York before becoming a Baptist minister. His work in the Baptist Church took him up and down the Hudson Valley, and he preached for a time in New Baltimore before finding his way to West Kill. His ministry in the Catskills was a busy one, and he published a journal called the Christian Repository for a time before leaving West Kill in the midst of the Anti-Rent War. He had been accused of favoring the up-renters, and delivered a heated sermon decrying the tactics of his down-renter parishioners before fleeing to Saugerties for several years.

An infection which resulted in his voice being too weak to

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An infection which resulted in his voice being too weak to preach led him to take up the art of the Daguerreotype, and his work as a Daguerreotypist resulted in his fascination with discovering a color photographic process.

Once the post for this new roadside marker is set I'll be driving it up to Lexington for an unveiling ceremony. Stay tuned for upcoming announcements of the date and time for that event as well as the unveiling ceremonies for other markers in our area!

As always questions and comments can be directed to archivist@gchistory.org.

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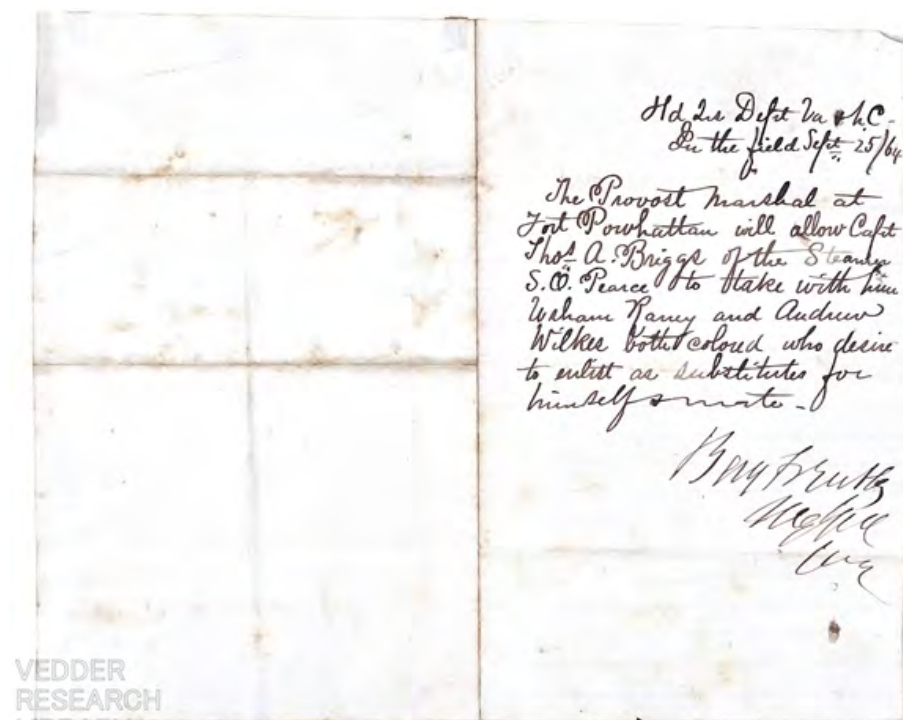
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
May 19, 2021

Captain Briggs' substitute


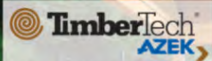
At the telegraph office in Hudson on September 24, 1864 Nathan Edmonds sent a terse message: "you are drafted and had better come home." It arrived in the hands of Captain Thomas Briggs of the steamboat Silas O. Pierce somewhere on the James River in Virginia that same evening. The content of the message must have come as no shock, because by the end of the next day two African American men named Isham Raney and Andrew Wilkes sat on the deck of the Pierce as it steamed from Fort Powhatan, VA back down the James towards the Federal stronghold at Fort Monroe. Both men had been paid as substitutes and were now on their way to enlist on behalf of Captain Briggs and his first mate.

The saga of Thomas Briggs and the Silas O. Pierce is a complex tale to recount. Both ship and captain were relatively new to their jobs when the Pierce was requisitioned by the Federal Government shortly after it slipped off the ways at the Morton and Edmonds Shipyard at Athens, NY in 1863. Thomas Briggs, perhaps due in equal part to his knowledge of the new vessel and his part ownership of it, followed the Pierce into Federal service as a supply vessel stationed on the Chesapeake at Fort Monroe.

His responsibilities as Captain of a government supply vessel apparently did not exempt him from the draft as subsequent events would demonstrate. Whether because of the danger of his assignment (Steamboats on the James were targets for Confederate Snipers) or because his draft eligibility had changed, his wife Deborah speculated morosely via letter in




This letter issued by the Provost Marshal at Fort Powhatan in 1864 gave Captain Briggs permission to take Isham Raney and Andrew Wilkes as substitutes for Briggs and his unnamed First Mate.



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March of 1864: "I think the best thing you can do is to have a man in your place and come home. I have no notion of having you carried off to Richmond, VA - would rather have you sail iceboats than to be captured by the rebels."

The Enrollment Act of 1863 was a national conscription designed to bolster the ranks of the Union Army as the war dragged into its third year. Though well-intended, it turned out to be a deeply flawed law which allowed the wealthy to buy outright exemptions and offered draftees the opportunity to pay others to serve in their stead. The Act was one of the primary contributors to the appallingly violent New York City Draft Riots of 1863, and in practice the Enrollment Act did little more than to help the wealthy avoid military service much to the chagrin of poorer families.

Thomas Briggs, as a son of an affluent merchant family, would not have had difficulty securing the \$300.00 buy-out as established in the initial version of the act. Whether he actually paid the \$300.00 exemption in 1863 is unknown, but the amended Enrollment Act of 1864 changed the exemption system to make buy-outs effective for only one year - thus making it more economical to hire a substitute to fight in one's place.

So, who were Isham Raney and Andrew Wilkes? A National Park Service website shows that records exist of two men by these names who joined Company/Battery B of the 2nd Regiment of United States Colored Light Artillery which was organized at Fort Monroe and stationed in that vicinity from 1864 through 1865. While the chances are high that these men are one and the same, no details exist to fill in the circumstances of their lives leading up to the day they stepped on board the Silas O. Pierce to go enlist on behalf of the ship's Captain and Mate.

There is also no information available concerning how much

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There is also no information available concerning how much they were paid to fight in Briggs' stead, or indeed whether they were paid at all. Following their enlistment neither man seems to have had subsequent contact with Briggs, so for all intents and purposes the association of these men seems to have commenced and ended with a boat ride from Fort Powhatan to Fort Monroe in September 1864.

Part two will follow next week!

As always questions and comments can be directed to archivist@gchistory.org.

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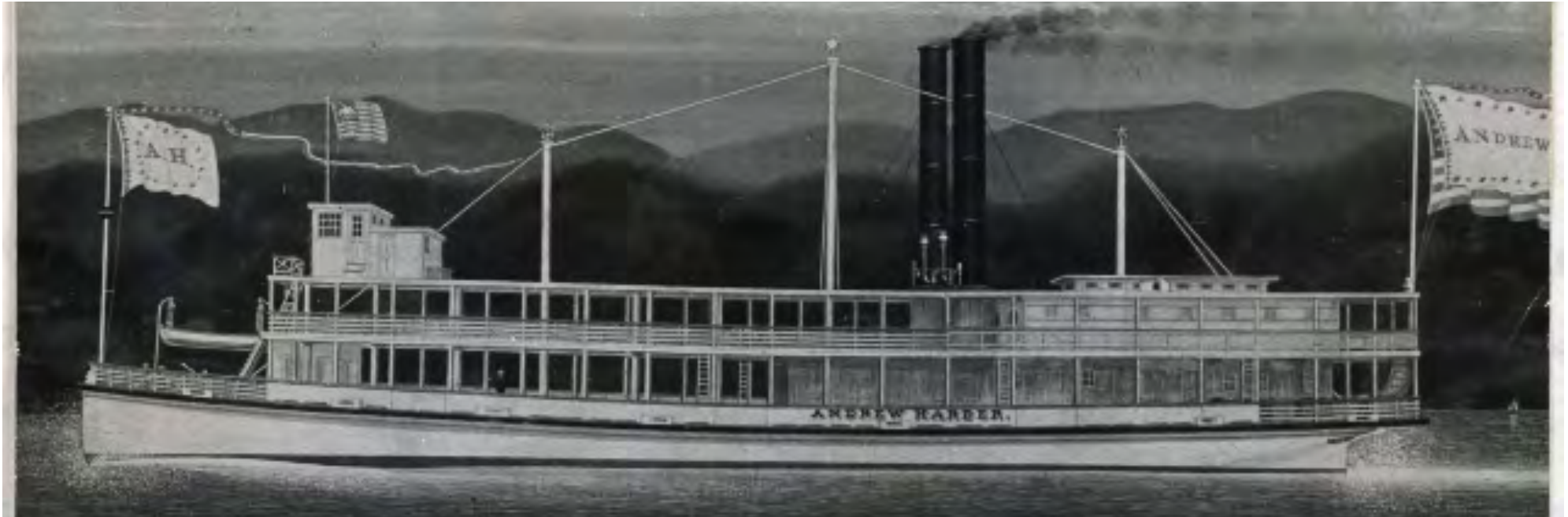
The Noon-Mark

A noon-mark is a traditional method used to track the passage of time

used to track the passage of time

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
May 29, 2021

Captain Briggs' substitute, part II



Photograph of a James Bard painting of the Andrew Harder when newly constructed. A year after this painting was done the Andrew Harder transported over one thousand escaped slaves from Port Royal, VA to Alexandria, VA while in service with the Union Army. From the F. Van Loon Ryder Collection, Vedder Research Library.

Andrew Wilkes and Isham Raney's lives prior to September 25, 1864 can be filled in with circumstantial clues. Throughout the Civil War the Union Army grappled with "contraband" - a term applied to enslaved people who had escaped southern plantations seeking freedom behind Union lines. Congress made it clear in the Confiscation Act of 1861 that these refugees were to be treated as confiscated enemy property, tacitly empowering the Union Army offer a semblance of



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freedom to these refugees under the pretext of disposing with "enemy property" as they saw fit.

In most cases these refugees became camp followers and laborers, and wages were paid both by the Army for labor in support roles and informally by individuals for services such as cooking and laundering. Interestingly Fort Monroe, where Captain Thomas Briggs and the Silas O. Pierce were later stationed, had been the first Union post to deal with the issue of "contraband" in early 1861 prior to the passage of the Confiscation Act.

With the Union Army suddenly empowered to nominally liberate escaped slaves reaching their lines, the influx of "contraband" increased considerably. The remarkable volume of escapees to Union lines is well documented, but an interesting vignette appears in an account from the logbook of the transport Andrew Harder cataloged as Log #192 in the collections of The Mariners' Museum and Park, Newport News, VA . The Harder was a freight boat built in New Baltimore and stationed during the war at Fort Monroe much like the Silas O. Pierce.

Coincidentally, the Andrew Harder was captained by another Athenian named R. P. Tremain. The Harder was on the Rappahannock River as a transport in May of 1864, moving everything from supplies and livestock to wounded soldiers. In one instance following the delivery of a boatload of army horses to Port Royal the Harder was tasked with taking 1200 escaped slaves from Port Royal on the Rappahannock to Alexandria, VA on the Potomac.

The road to freedom for these 1,200 escapees boarding the Andrew Harder had been an arduous one - sneaking across a countryside ravaged by years of fighting and navigating the no mans land between Confederate and Union occupied territory, often with children and elderly family members in tow. Their

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often with children and elderly family members in tow. Their path to freedom offered no guarantee of success, and those who were not promptly recaptured within miles of the plantations they fled were just as likely to encounter Confederate army units and rebel sympathizers who would facilitate their return to slavery.

There are even instances recorded of Union pickets detaining refugees and returning them to Confederate lines in order to receive lucrative rewards offered by slaveowners. Those who managed to run this gauntlet would arrive in the care of the Union army only to find themselves more or less detained awaiting designation as contraband. For the refugees on the Harder the reality of their successful escape was not fully apparent until they were about to embark. Tremain recounted the scene in his logbook how once news spread that the Andrew Harder was on its way to Washington the escapees "hade [sic] a jubilee [sic] singing of freedom the riches [sic] thing I ever heard in my life." It is fortunate that Tremain found the scene moving enough to record in his log for posterity.

The people on the Andrew Harder as well as countless other thousands the Union Army designated as contraband subsequently entered in a state of limbo - no longer enslaved, but not yet released from the auspices of the Army under whose oversight they were not yet truly free. It is likely that their status as contraband was the reason the Provost Marshall at Fort Powhatan was the one charged with signing off on the release of Andrew Wilkes and Isham Raney to Captain Briggs' care. Either these two men were new arrivals who had reached Fort Powhatan following its recent capture by Union forces, or they were contraband laborers stationed there expanding and improving the fort's defenses.

There is still much of this story left to cover, and I would like to say that part three will appear next week... but this is slowly turning into a 2,500+ essay that I may reserve for publication



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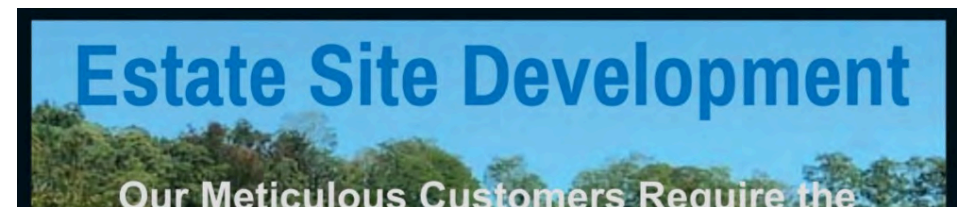
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
June 5, 2021

A vacation in my car



Two slides from the vacation, dated 1963.

I have a messy car. In addition to the usual collection of papers, empty water bottles, various coats, and random books that comprise its usual clutter, I've had a vacation riding around in it with me for the past year. This vacation has not been fun, and I still don't know what to do about it. I should



also mention that this vacation was not mine.

Unlike typical vacations, I found this one boxed up in a pile of free items outside a local antique store (I have been told that this is not where most people find vacations). Within this free box were scenes of faraway Europe forever preserved in the vibrant hues of Kodachrome slide film. It was jarring to find someone's once-treasured memories wantonly cast out on the sidewalk to be disposed of at the mercy of a stranger's curiosity.

Needless to say I scooped them up; my decision fueled in part by the intrinsic beauty of Kodachrome (just ask Paul Simon if you don't believe me) and on the other hand spurred on by my profession as an archivist.

Archives are a strange institution, and really I'd say their closest companion is not the library but the graveyard. Archival collections, like gravestones, are manifestations of the individual's effort to endure beyond their time. This comparison is probably best illustrated by the prevalence of "Memorial Collections" in archives like the Vedder Research Library.

These memorial collections, often donated by family and descendants of those so honored, serve to enshrine vestiges of who that person was and allow something of their character to endure. Whether the donor's objective was to enshrine themselves, an ancestor, or to preserve something they deemed important to the community (or more commonly a holistic mixture of those goals) the end result always happily benefits researchers and the public. Sometimes that benefit is immediately apparent, and sometimes it takes fifty years for that collection to finally be examined. Archives and graveyards play the long game in that way.

The process by which a person's collection ends up in the



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The process by which a person's collection ends up in the archive is imperfect at best, and really what ends up boxed on a shelf is the product of a filtering process fraught with obstacles. The vacation in my car is just one example of the variety of items that slip through the cracks between someone's passing and the arrival of their collection at a research facility. Sentimental value, more than anything else, seems to be the primary factor in this filtering process. What may have been exceedingly important to one generation may be of mild interest to their children, and sometimes if those materials don't meet the fluctuating criteria by which something is deemed "historic" it is just as likely to get tossed as it is to be saved by those who inherit items. The box of color slides of Europe apparently never passed muster as "historic" and got filtered out when it came time to clean, and the only thing that intervened in their destruction was the evaluation of a shop owner who saw these as too worthless to sell but too priceless to chuck.

Divested of their context and with no owner to lay claim they now languish in limbo. I know these slides are the last trace of something that was once dear to the person who took them, but their subject matter and lack of provenance make them nearly worthless to any local repository. For now it seems I'm stuck with this vacation.

As always questions and comments can be directed to archivist@gchistory.org.

Find it and other Noon-Mark articles here.

A wooden barrel-shaped sign with a metal spigot on the left. The text on the barrel reads "DISCOUNT BEVERAGE" in large letters, with "TOBACCO" and "GROCERIES" in smaller letters below it. Above the barrel, it says "NEW ARRIVALS!".

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Three small images arranged horizontally. The first shows the exterior of a building. The second shows a variety of meats, including what looks like pork chops and sausages. The third shows a plate of bratwurst served with sauerkraut and red cabbage.

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A photograph of a man and a woman from behind, embracing in a field. The sun is setting in the background, creating a warm, golden glow.

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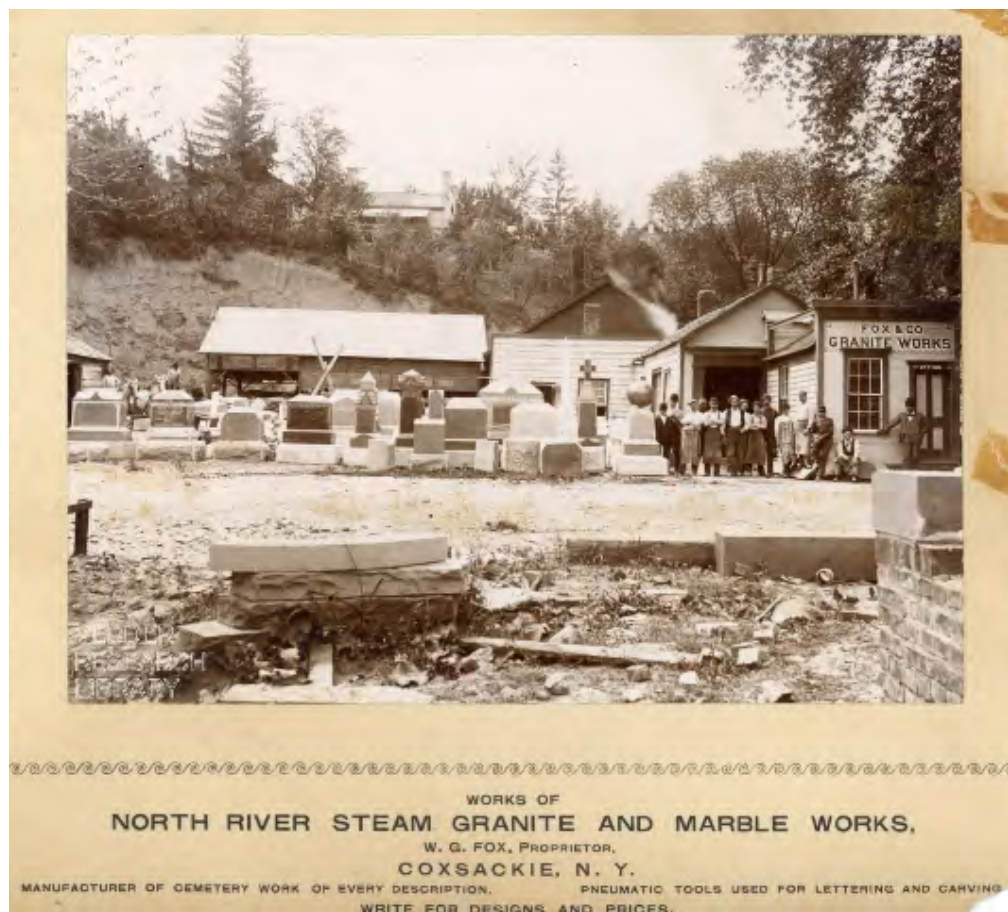
The Noon-Mark

A noon-mark is a traditional method used to track the passage of time

used to track the passage of time

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
June 11, 2021

Granite and Marble Works of Coxsackie



This week I'm just sending along an interesting image of the North River Steam Granite and Marble Works located on South River Street in Coxsackie, circa 1890. With so much attention paid by genealogists and historians to cemeteries and graveyards it remains a source of no small mystery to me why we pay comparatively little attention to the 19th-century

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industry and artists responsible for the stones that fill our graveyards.

For the past few years, I've been taking note of the signatures which stonecutters added to their work, particularly on early and mid-19th century marble markers.

Israel Baldwin of Catskill is just one of the artists whose work endures in cemeteries in the vicinity of Catskill. His transcribed account book of gravestone orders is a source available to researchers at the Vedder Research Library in Coxsackie.

Of particular curiosity to me is another stonecutter who signed his work "Loomis" and was based in Kinderhook, NY. Stones by his shop (or possibly by him personally) appear in graveyards in Coxsackie, Greenville, Durham, and Cairo to name just a few—a surprising example of the distance stones would travel when families ordered works by accomplished and in-demand stone carvers.

Little is available offhand to shed light on the longevity of the North River Steam Granite and Marble Works, though judging by the age of this photo answers would be forthcoming in an examination of newspapers and local directories. I have it on good authority that castoffs and fragments from this shop can still be found in considerable quantities at the lot this site occupied.

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A noon-mark is a traditional method used to track the passage of time

used to track the passage of time

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
June 15, 2021

In praise of the Catskills



The 'ghost' of the old Hardenbergh patent which I encountered camping this past week. Alf Evers' book 'The Catskills' is filled with fascinating tales about the history of the mountains and vestiges of its tumultuous past.

I've only just this past month discovered Alf Evers, and am now well into his famed 1972 history *The Catskills: From Wilderness to Woodstock*. Despite having not yet finished it I'm already fairly convinced that it should be mandatory reading for all residents in the vicinity of the Catskill Park. The Catskills is a

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history filled with ghosts and folk tales which sports more fascinating anecdotes and citations than I could shake a stick at.

Evers weaves a remarkable vision of the mountains from many disparate threads and revels in the intersection of "history" and "story" with an unapologetically literary flare. Frankly there could be no other more appropriate treatment of the subject, as the Catskills are equally a composition of geology and the minds eye working in concert to render looming peaks and hidden valleys filled with larger-than-life characters and Edenic scenes. Each chapter is nothing less than good fun.

The Catskills manages to accomplish seemingly impossible feats in its seamless blending of a remarkably vast pageant of events and historical sources. The greatest among these achievements is Evers' teasing out of the salient points concerning the Hardenbergh Patent. Granted to a small and well-connected cadre of colonial businessmen in 1708, the Patent was a cataclysmically confounding orchestra of a land grant spawned by backdoor dealings, trickery, and abject greed by which virtually the entirety of the Catskill Mountains were more or less given away. The two million acre Hardenbergh Patent seems to be one of Evers' favorite characters, and his allusion to its ghostlike nature is an apt one. Truly the patent seemed to haunt those who became involved in it.

None of the patentees of 1708 lived to see the courts make clear determinations of all the Hardenbergh Patent's boundaries, and thus it became an albatross to those who inherited divisions of its untamed and wild "Great Lots." Even the Livingstons (Robert, Robert, and Robert) seemed unable to master their divisions of the Patent in the later 18th century even as the family worked to help shape a new nation. The Patent alternately bolstered and ruined the finances of speculators as it consumed settlers in its impenetrable

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speculators as it concerned others in its imperious expanse. Men measured their entire careers by their unceasing efforts to survey and describe it. In these ways the Hardenbergh Patent, which at its core was nothing more than a crudely defined description of land written on a piece of parchment, transcended itself to become something almost alive and timelessly lingering. Evers does well early in the book explaining the ways folks in the Catskills carried the legacy of the Patent in collective memory well into the 20th century.

The ghost of the Hardenbergh Patent isn't as sinister today as it once was. I know because I stumbled across one of its diverse manifestations while on vacation this week. I was away camping at Little Pond near the Delaware/Ulster County line, and pulled over to the side of the road shortly before the campground's entrance to snap a photo of the apparition I saw. Being deep into Evers' book, I had to laugh as I looked at the "ghost" before me: a highway sign which read "Town of Hardenburgh: Building Code in Effect Inquire Town Clerk." William Cockburn, who spent decades serving as a surveyor and rent agent for Hardenbergh Patentees, would roll in his grave to see the once-mighty Patent reduced finally to such vestiges as the paved highways and fishing areas of the beautiful but comparatively small Town of Hardenburgh.

Where once "Hardenbergh" had been synonymous with bold and foolhardy schemes, modern landowners need look no further than the town clerk's office to make sure their permits are in order. Civilization has finally encroached where not two centuries before the same tracts had once eluded the conquering efforts of New York's most powerful and well-connected men.

Today there are designated bike routes, electricity chases away the foreboding dark, and a meal can be had even if you aren't a cunning woodsman. At last it seems the unruly ghost of the Patent is nearly laid to rest. The mountains themselves of

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course endure, and in that way the grand story that captivated Alf Evers continues to be written even after he sent his own contribution to print. Naturally I'd say its worth your time to grab a copy.

Questions and comments can be directed to Jon via archivist@gchistory.org

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A noon-mark is a traditional method used to track the passage of time

used to track the passage of time

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
June 22, 2021

A tour of the Palenville Cemetery



Crane Davis of Palenville narrates details of the life of Theodore Teale for attendees during Saturday's history walk in the Palenville Cemetery.

No long article this week. This past Saturday I was pleased to attend a Cemetery History Walk in the Palenville Cemetery. The event occurred thanks to the research efforts (and diligent organizing) of Eva Behr and the Behr family in partnership with the nonprofit group Palenville: The Hamlet and the trustees of the Palenville Cemetery Association.

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the Palenville Cemetery Association.

The tour offered a fascinating window into the long history of the hamlet and covered everything from tanneries to famous resorts. Volunteers from the community braved the heat to sit at select gravesites and deliver narrations, and Stewarts provided ice cream which was enjoyed by volunteers and attendees alike.

I have no doubt there are many reading this who would have liked to attend, and fortunately those who missed it will be pleased to know that the organizers came up with an innovative way to let you visit and experience the tour at your convenience.

At the gravesites of the individuals featured on the tour are temporary signs with scannable QR codes. Those QR codes link to biographies which can be read on your smartphone at your own pace, and the biographies can also be viewed through the website www.palenvillenyny.com.

Those who would prefer to pair their studies with a little more intensive exercise could also consider attending a gravestone cleaning tutorial being held there on Saturday, June 27 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. The Palenville Cemetery is located at the end of Birchwood Park Extension off Route 23A.

Questions and comments can be directed to Jon via archivist@gchistory.org

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A noon-mark is a traditional method used to track the passage of time

Estate Site Development

used to track the passage of time

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
June 30, 2021

A scene on Catskill Creek



A schooner is tied up in Catskill Creek awaiting a load of brick at the Catskill Shale and Paving Brick Company circa 1900. Barbara Rivette Collection, Vedder Research Library.

This week features a snapshot recently scanned from the collections of the Vedder Research Library showing a three masted freight schooner named "Nantasket" tied up in Catskill Creek at the Catskill Shale Brick and Paving Company. The shale brick plant specialized in the firing of bricks which

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included crushed shale in their composition to make them more resilient as pavers for sidewalks and roads.

Catskill paving bricks can be found up and down the east coast - most famously there are a number visible on streets in Savannah, GA. The shale was sourced from a quarry in Cairo and moved to Catskill by freight trains along the Catskill Mountain Railway.

The schooner itself is of a style which was common along the east coast of the United States up through the interwar period. The relatively low operating cost of a wind-powered cargo vessel made schooners like the Nantasket exceedingly economical to run when compared with their faster but coal- and fuel-hungry engine powered counterparts. So long as the cargo being moved wasn't time sensitive such schooners survived in a niche of an otherwise increasingly mechanized shipping industry. I have it on good authority that bricks don't spoil on a two week sail down the coast.

The exact date of this photo is unknown, but a good clue as to a rough year are the four large chimneys visible above the shale brick plant. Those chimneys were the byproduct of a neighborhood dispute which came to a head in 1896.

When originally constructed the kilns of the shale brick plant sported numerous short chimneys from which particularly sooty fumes spewed into the neighborhood. Residents of homes on Main Street (seen uphill from the plant in this photo) found their homes contaminated with a fine layer of soot, their laundry stained, and their lungs irritated by airborne contaminants whenever the kilns were in operation.

Petitions and correspondence concerning the issue resulted in the eventual construction of taller chimneys to conduct noxious fumes higher into the air and away from the plant's neighbors. By that reckoning the image dates sometime

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between 1897 and before the company began experiencing financial difficulties in 1907-08.

To view the location of this scene today one must find themselves in a boat on Catskill Creek looking north towards the condominiums that stand along Marina Drive off lower Main Street.

Questions and comments can be directed to Jon via archivist@gchistory.org

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By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
July 5, 2021

Possessing history



George Blenner's photo of the Catskill Mountain House in 1947.

In the Greene County Historical Society's extensive photographic file on the Catskill Mountain House there is a snapshot I was already well acquainted with many years before my employment. The particular photo was taken in 1947 by my grandfather, George Blenner, during one of his boyhood summer camping trips at North Lake, and it seems one of the many copies he made of the picture found its way to the Society's permanent collections in the 1990s.

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The Mountain House as my grandfather saw it in 1947 was caught in limbo following what proved to be its final closure. Though the outlook was bleak there was still a caretaker on the grounds and ice in the icehouse which my grandfather recalled helping himself to when the caretaker wasn't nearby. Campers are a resourceful bunch.

The scene he captured shows boarded windows and overgrown landscaping in stark contrast to the manicured wilderness the Mountain House offered high-born visitors of the preceding century. In spite of those visible signs of decline the old hotel somehow retained much of its presence and grandeur. The columns were intact, not yet toppled by a hurricane in the '50s, and the building still stood straight and square as though reopening it would take nothing more than a fresh coat of paint. Doubtless it was that lingering trace of majesty which inspired my grandfather and so many other visitors to take pictures of the old resort in its twilight years.

Possession is an integral component in the preservation of the memory of the Mountain House. In casual conversation participants demonstrate possession of their shares in its collective memory by giving rote recitation of the salient points of the hotel's chronology. Collectors seek pieces from the hotel and trappings of its grandeur in order to possess the last physical manifestations of it. Historians grapple with the Mountain House as a phenomenon and come to possess intimate knowledge of its significance. Visitors who saw its decline recount their experiences at the site and share images. All of these tales and talismans, which vary considerably, are personal possessions to be distributed on the holder's terms. These tales and talismans are probably guarded and treasured more than the Mountain House itself ever was.

The reason possession plays an integral part in the story is

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probably because we see ourselves as having been dispossessed of the actual thing. Some would probably go so far as to say the Mountain House's destruction was outright theft. It is my experience that invariably all discussion and stories about the Mountain House culminate with the line "they burned it in 1963" — "they" of course being the bureaucratic and malign "State Conservation Department" which is always the bad guy in the tale. Sidestepping this gross misrepresentation of the Conservation Department and their merciful removal of a blight on the Catskill Park, the idea that outsiders took away one of the important pieces of our cultural identity certainly explains why so much value is placed on every trace of the Mountain House we can track down.

The odd part of all this is that for most of its existence the Mountain House was never really ours to possess. While the hotel's success was thanks largely to a local man, its cultural role was strictly to benefit those clientele that author Alf Evers styles "the better sort." Truly, the Catskill Mountain House was operated for America's aristocracy. Industrialists, influential artists and writers, financiers, and landed gentry made the Mountain House the center of a seasonal pay-to-play "see and be seen" which hinged on the principal of exclusivity. Only when "the better sort" had finally cast the Mountain House aside did we get a chance to possess it.

As the hotel sat crumbling in the late 1940s and 1950s it became a local attraction. Kids hiked up from Palenville to play hide and seek in rooms which were once off limits to all but the wealthiest visitors, sightseers strolled along the porch where once they would have been discretely shooed off by hotel staff, and picnic lunches brought from home were eaten out of paper bags in the same place where exquisitely catered meals were once served on fine china. For a time the final owners attempted to exact an entrance fee from visitors in order to see the ruins, but all was for naught, and now that the Mountain House is gone the only place to see it is in the



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the house is gone and only place to see it is in the memories and artifacts of those fortunate to possess them.

Years ago, my grandfather and I walked up the road from South Lake to the site of the Mountain House. He had a copy of the photo he took in 1947 with him in his jacket and produced it when we got to the cliff and looked out over the valley. I was very young at the time, but my grandfather decided even then it was time he shared his piece of the Catskill Mountain House with me. With this article you now possess it too.

Questions and comments can be directed to Jon via archivist@gchistory.org

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July 13, 2021

French Émigrés and the Plan of Esperanza



Image of the 1794 Engraved Plan of Esperanza by Pierre Pharoux and Charles B. J. F  vret de Saint-M  min, from the website of Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps, Inc.

In the tumultuous years following the commencement of the French Revolution in 1789 the City of New York and its interconnected social circles stretching north along the Hudson welcomed newly arrived expatriates from the young and tumultuous French Republic. The Livingston family, representing the epicenter of New York Society, accepted several of these gentlemen into their graces in the early 1790s. Chief among them: surveyor/architect Pierre Pharoux, visionary Pierre de la Bigarre (aka Peter DeLabigarre), and

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artist Charles B. J. F  vret de Saint-M  min.

These three men, acquainted as countrymen in a foreign land and involved in overlapping ventures, are celebrated by modern scholars for a number of different and notable achievements, but locally their influence is often overlooked or entirely unknown. This is surprising given that these French   migr  s were integral to the story of Esperanza, the 1794 land speculation undertaken by Edward Livingston, John R. Livingston, Ephraim Hart, Elihu C. Goodrich, and Brockholst Livingston to create a new planned city where the Village of Athens now stands.

How these Frenchmen managed to remain omitted for so long from the history of Athens is a complicated tale, but matters were made worse by William Pelletreau. It appears that Mr. Pelletreau, who wrote the remarkable and authoritative chapter on Athens for the 1884 History of Greene County, made a transcription error concerning an early map. That map, engraved circa 1795 showing the proposed city of Esperanza, was a fascinating artifact complete with street names and designated civic spaces. The copy Pelletreau examined was likely one of two copies which were accessible to him in the 1880s.

Neither local version of the Plan of Esperanza included a title nor attribution naming the creator, though tradition brought down to him clues that the map was produced by a mysterious "P. Pharmix." That name, as it turns out, was a misconstrued reimagining of the surname Pharoux, though this connection has only been made definitive by scholars in the last thirty years.

Pierre Pharoux is the most tragic of the three   migr  s involved in the Esperanza speculation. Originally from Paris and a participant in the earliest years of the French Revolution, Pharoux is celebrated today for the journal he kept of his time

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in America and for several unusual civic and architectural plans he produced for affluent clients in the Hudson Valley. He originally came to the United States as one of the surveyor-agents working on behalf of the La Compagnie de New York which was organized to settle refugees of the French Revolution on land in modern-day Lewis and Jefferson Counties.

Pharoux's journal offers a detailed window on his projects and the social circles he moved in during his time in the United States, but his work was cut short when he drowned in a rapids with several others in September of 1795.

It is likely Pharoux's death, the unrelated failure of the Esperanza venture, and the misattribution of the map he helped create conspired to relegate his name and contributions to the dustbin for so long. Fortunately recent attention given to an auctioned engraving of his Plan of Esperanza and the increased availability of far flung digitized collection items at the Huntington Library and National Gallery of Art have served to reestablish the significance of his work in the Hudson Valley in the years prior to his death. An authoritative transcribed version of his Journal was also published by Cornell University Press in 2010.

The engraver of the Plan of Esperanza was Charles B. J. F  vret de Saint-M  min, a friend of Peter DeLabigarre (the third French   migr   of this tale) who is most celebrated for his portraits. Acquainted with the upper crust of New York society, Saint-M  min was able to produce engraved portraits of dozens of prominent citizens and acquaintances as well as portraits from life of several of the Founding Fathers. His friendship with and early patronage by John R. Livingston makes Saint-M  min's participation in the creation of the Plan of Esperanza no small surprise, as Livingston was one of the principal stakeholders in the venture. Whether the high-born






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speculators in the Esperanza venture retained Pharoux and Saint-Mémin individually or jointly is unknown, but Pharoux's journal includes mention of passing along drawings so that Saint-Mémin could produce an unknown number of copies which today are highly sought after rare collectibles.

It is possible Pharoux's drawings are the same ones which which are now available as digitized manuscripts through the Huntington Library, though this is unclear.

Part Two will follow next week.

Questions and comments can be directed to Jon via
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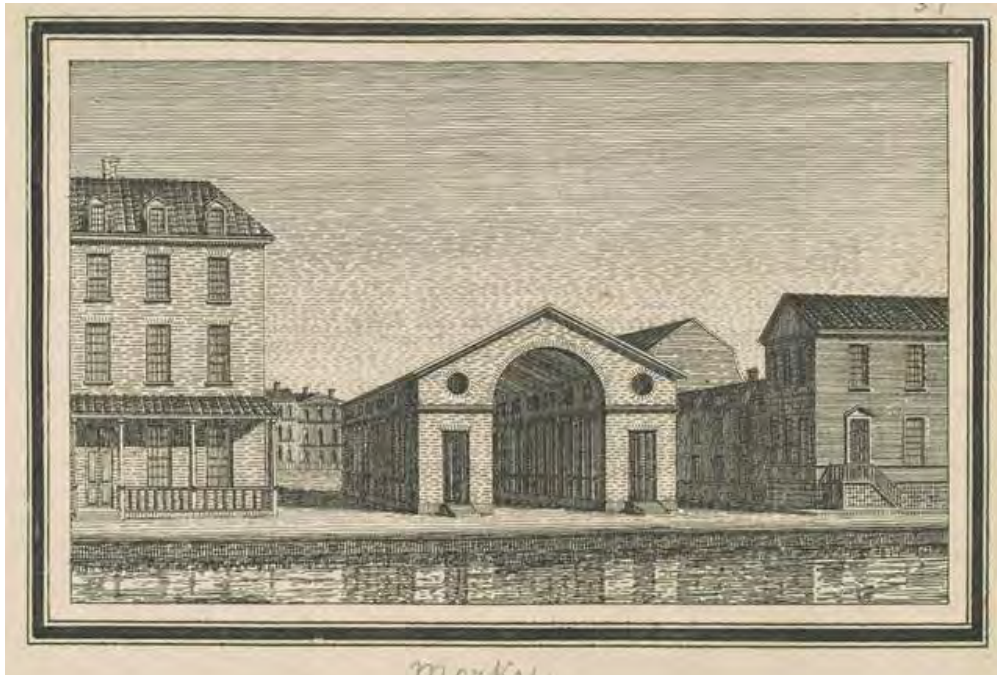
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By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
July 20, 2021

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Top, image of a proposed market square in Esperanza by Pierre Pharoux and Charles B. J. F  vret de Saint-M  min. From the Corcoran Collection, 2015.19.1584.57.3, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Bottom, this map, only one of three known, is housed at the Greene County Clerk's Office in Catskill, NY.

Peter DeLabigarre is the fascinating figure who completes this   migr   trio. Alf Evers spends an entire chapter of his book *The Catskills* on him — specifically the ventures DeLabigarre undertook in the Catskill Mountains for the benefit of science, mankind, and personal finances. Those ventures, done under the auspices of his friend and neighbor Chancellor Robert Livingston, included the notable and likely first recorded ascents of Overlook Mountain and Kaaterskill High Peak.

DeLabigarre even named the latter “Liberty Cap” in his reports to celebrate America and France’s kindred Revolutionary spirit. DeLabigarre also famously tried to promote the cultivation of Silk Worms on the Livingston’s estates and was also a close friend to Edward, youngest brother of Chancellor Livingston and another member of the group of speculators at Esperanza.

Among DeLabigarre’s other ventures was the creation of a proposed town on the banks of the Hudson to be crowned by his estate “Chateau de Tivoli” and lying nearby the lands of Chancellor Livingston at Clermont. While his proposal for the town never panned out, the Tivoli of today is still known by the classical name granted to it by its famous   migr   resident. The only other remnants of DeLabigarre’s Tivoli dream endure in an engraved map made by none other than Charles B. J. F  vret de Saint M  min, and it is unknown if the actual survey work was

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Saint-Mémin, and it is unknown if the actual survey work was conducted by DeLabigarre or by Pharoux as a talented mutual acquaintance.

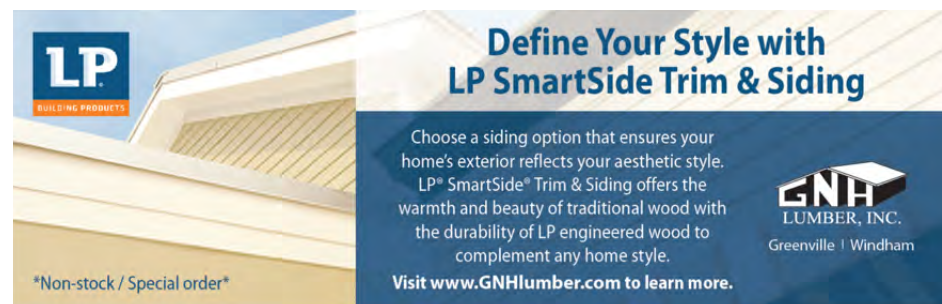
As the plans of Esperanza and Tivoli were being produced at virtually the same time and by people in the same circles, it would be an odd coincidence if Pharoux wasn't involved with both.

It is thanks largely to the research and digitization efforts of several major repositories and an auction house that the identities of the creators of the Plan of Esperanza are now definitively known. As such, this information certainly serves to contextualize certain aspects of the Plan of Esperanza which were of obvious interest even in the 1880s to William Pelletreau.

In the 1884 History of Greene County he makes note of the inclusion of streets named Liberty and Equality, a facet of the map now demystified with the revelation that its creators were men endeared to the democratic principals of the French Revolution but not the violence that defined much of the 1790s that precipitated their removal to the United States.

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of Pharoux's Plan of Esperanza is the part of the plan William Pelletreau didn't know existed when he wrote his history in the 1880s. Not only did Pharoux prepare a map as surveyor, he also applied his visionary concepts of architecture and civic planning in a selection of drawings which were also engraved by Saint-Mémin to accompany the map.

Saint-Mémin's engravings of those buildings are now digitized and available online through the National Gallery of Art, and as a collection testify to a comprehensive vision for Esperanza which until recently has never been fully grasped by local historians. The scale and vision of the plan, coupled with an understanding of the background of the remarkable people



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understanding of the background of the remarkable people involved, leaves more questions than answers as to why Esperanza failed.

By 1801 portions of the proposed but unrealized City of Esperanza would be subsumed in a competing speculation led by Isaac Northrup and several businessmen from Hudson, resulting in the highly successful incorporation of the Village of Athens in 1805 as Greene County's first fully realized planned community.

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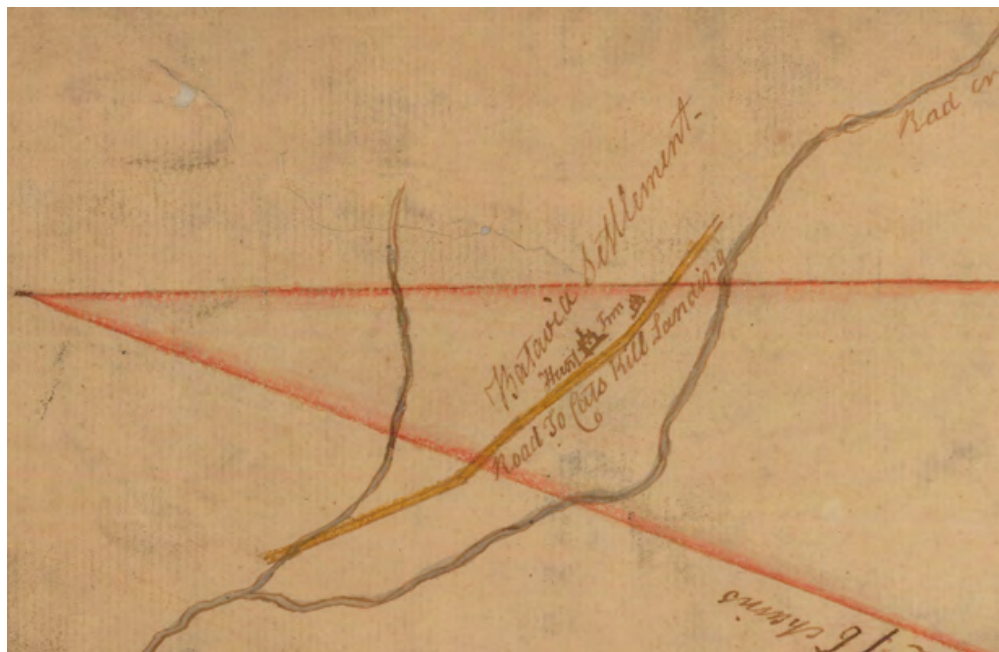
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July 20, 2021

used to track the passage of time

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
July 27, 2021

Up on the Mountain Top



Detail from the 1798 Cantine Map of the Town of Catskill showing the Batavia Settlement and Hunt Farm at the western end of the Town. From the New York State Archives: State Engineer and Surveyor. Survey maps of lands in New York State, ca. 1711-1913. Series A0273-78, Map #369A.

There is no simple way to explain the history of European settlement on the Mountain Top. It is a saga filled with squatters and land agents, transient settlers and ever-shifting boundary lines conspiring to form a complicated pageant performed on a stage set by the ancient Hardenbergh Patent and interrupted by the American Revolution. By contrast, one can commence a Eurocentric history of places like Coxsackie

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and Catskill with a recounting of the stories of the first settlers there. In simple chronological fashion those first “flatlanders” did something exceedingly conventional: they started by arriving, and then they stayed put.

In the Catskills this orthodox method of recounting past events cannot be easily applied. The first passage of Rev. Henry H. Prout's *Old Times in Windham* commences with the story of a Dr. Thomas Benham, lauded as one of the early settlers of what much later became Ashland. Much of the beginning of the passage concerning Benham and his family is really nothing more than a long qualifying clause establishing that he (along with most of his cohort who arrived in the late 1780s and early 1790s) was notable not for being first but for being among the ones who finally, after a succession of previous visitors, actually managed to stick it out. Vague references are given to those souls who had come before in attempts to clear and farm unsuccessfully along the valley of the Batavia Kill “during the Revolution;” adding an air of mystery often absent from histories of the Valley towns.

Terminology too seems to obscure a simple recounting of the history of the Mountain Top. First among these is the term “Mountain Top” itself — to my knowledge nobody is clear when this phrase came into common use (though I'm eager to find out). Surprising to the uninitiated is that “Mountain Top” is used to refer to places that are not actually on top of mountains, just unusually close to them. The Mountain Top is defined variously as beginning at the top of Route 23A at Haines Falls and at East Windham on Route 23, and extending variously to include Hunter, Jewett, Lexington, Ashland, Windham, and Prattsville... but never poor Halcott. My writer friend from Maplecrest explained succinctly that the Mountain Top is all of Greene County's share of the watershed of the Schoharie Kill plus Lanesville and Haines Falls. Another old timer from the Mountain Top, when asked what he called people from the Valley insightfully replied to me “who cares?!”

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people from the valley, indignantly replied to the who cared... with a grin on his face. If one is not in possession of a watershed map such responses solicited from locals may also suffice to measure the extent of the Mountain Top.

For a brief moment in time a harmonious clarity prevailed in the story of the Mountain Top, and it occurred beginning in 1798 when the old Town of Windham was formed from parts of Albany and Ulster Counties. This township evolved until 1803 when it became what is known today as "Old Windham" covering a swath of the Catskills which formed the loftiest half of the newly formed County of Greene. Unlike past attempts to delineate the Catskills, Old Windham presented a more sensical overlap of geographic and political boundaries which for the entire history of the Mountain Top up to that point had never existed in harmony. A good illustration of this preexisting discord is a fascinating digitized map I stumbled across on the website of the New York State Archives. The map was created by John Cantine as a reference to show the extent of the Town of Catskill as it appeared in 1798 around the time Windham was initially formed.

On this two-part map the Town of Catskill is shaped like a doorstep with its pointy wedge driving deep into the Catskills and finishing at an arbitrary point somewhere in modern Ashland. It is an absurd boundary by any metric past or present. Shown at that strange westernmost point is the "Hunt Farm" and "Batavia Settlement." That farm is quite likely Medad Hunt's homesite and tavern in Pleasant Valley near where he donated land to create the first meeting house in Old Windham in 1799. Hunt's tavern and the Batavia Settlement figure large in the story of Old Windham, and those names cannot be separated from any discussion of the Mountain Top's history. It is very disquieting therefore to see one of the giants of Old Windham shown residing in the Town of Catskill; almost as though those "Flatlanders" reached up into the hills to stake a claim where they didn't belong among



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hardy mountain folk.

A couple of years after Cantine's map was completed the Batavia Settlement was subsumed fully by Old Windham, and in that consolidation so too was the early history of the Mountain Top consolidated into a passable reference point (though not a chronological starting point) for those concerned with the history of this area. Perhaps this imperfection lends a suitably small additional amount of mystery and obfuscation to the history of the Mountain Top — in the end, just as the mountains continue to refute our efforts to tame them, so too do they refute our efforts to completely define them.

Questions and comments can be directed to Jon via archivist@gchistory.org

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A noon-mark is a traditional method used to track the passage of time

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Up on the Mountain

July 27, 2024

used to track the passage of time

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
August 5, 2021

Cantine's 1798 map and a big announcement



Image caption: This detail from the eastern portion of John Cantine's Map of the Town of Catskill shows the original site of the Dutch Reformed Church of Catskill where it stood near the modern Barnwood Restaurant. From the New York State Archives: State Engineer and Surveyor. Survey maps of lands in New York State, ca. 1711-1913. Series A0273-78, Map #369B.

An announcement to kick things off this week: there will be a New York State Roadside History Marker dedication in West Kill this coming Saturday, August 7 at 2 p.m. in front of the

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An advertisement for 'Estate Site Development' by 'The MAGGIO FAMILY'. The background is a photograph of a large, white, two-story house with a dark roof, situated on a green lawn. In the foreground, a red excavator is working on a dirt path. The text is overlaid on the image. At the top, 'Estate Site Development' is written in large blue letters. Below it, in white text, is 'Our Meticulous Customers Require the Highest QUALITY and WORKMANSHIP ...and that's why they choose The MAGGIO FAMILY'. The company name 'MAGGIO' is written in large, bold, black letters with a white outline. Below that, in smaller black letters, is 'PAVING • SEPTIC • SITEWORK'. The phone number '518-622-9882' is written in large, bold, black letters. At the bottom, in smaller black letters, is 'Family Owned and Operated... 53 Years Serving the Public...'.

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West Kill Baptist Church. The address is 75 Spruceton Rd, West Kill, NY 12492, and there will be a small reception following the dedication at the West Kill/Lexington Community Hall just up the street.

The History Marker commemorates the photographic innovations of Rev. Levi Hill of West Kill, who has only recently come to be recognized by scholars as possibly the earliest pioneer of color photography. We hope you can join myself and Lexington Town Historian Mary Palazzolo for this lovely afternoon event. This New York State Roadside History Marker was created and funded thanks to the William Pomeroy Foundation's roadside history marker program.

Now, to follow up briefly on last week's article about the Mountain Top I just wanted to make mention again of that 1798 John Cantine Map of the Town of Catskill. This map is one of those fascinating documents which we in the history business call an "RRDCM" (meaning really really dang cool map). If you didn't hop online last week to track down the digital copy of it on the website of the NYS Archives you should find a computer and use this link to check it out now. The eastern half of the map can be found here: <https://digitalcollections.archives.nysed.gov/index.php/Detail/objects/36925>

To guide your viewing of the eastern half of the map I'll make honorable mention of some of the fascinating things to be seen. The first thing observers should note is that along the river at the northern boundary of the Town the small hamlet of Loonenburg labeled as "Esperanza" can be seen with the Zion Lutheran Evangelical Church drawn in as its most prominent building. The lower village which became Athens in 1805 is shown just south of Esperanza as a solitary little structure which is likely the Jan Van Loon House which still stands at the south end of the modern Village (it's the little

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yellow cottage by Route 385 so many of us are familiar with). It is an odd bit of trivia to remember that the Village of Athens was incorporated within the bounds of the Town of Catskill a year before the Village of Catskill was incorporated. I assure you that your friends will find this fact very interesting if you relay it to them at social gatherings.

Looking at the southern end of the map one can easily spot Catskill, shown with a rough grid approximately reflecting the street plan of the rapidly growing community at the mouth of the Catskill Creek. Following the many roads leading from the Village going west and south it is interesting to note that John Cantine not only drew the roads from actual surveys (roads with an "x" on their route indicate that these are accurate to their surveys) but that he also included important homes, mills, and taverns at their proper locations. This is fascinating because many buildings now otherwise lost to time appear in their accurate locations. The mill shown on the Hans Vosen Kill is a perfect example of this. It was possibly the earliest mill built in Catskill in the late 17th century, and Cantine shows it just east of Jefferson Heights in 1798 — giving us a more complete idea of its whereabouts on this small tributary as no physical traces of the site now remain.

Out in modern Leeds it is curious to note how sparsely developed the hamlet looks. Leeds at that time was not yet graced with its two large textile mills and still reflected its earlier agrarian appearance. Following the road west out of the hamlet (marked by Schuneman's House and Mill) one can trace where it crossed the Catskill Creek at the Leeds Bridge at which point turned along the flats heading near to where the Barnwood Restaurant now stands on Route 23. In 1798 the Dutch Reformed Church stood just west of there on Cauterskill Road, and Cantine faithfully rendered the old church at that spot on his map. A NYS Roadside History Marker is all that remains to indicate that this important early Church stood on that spot.



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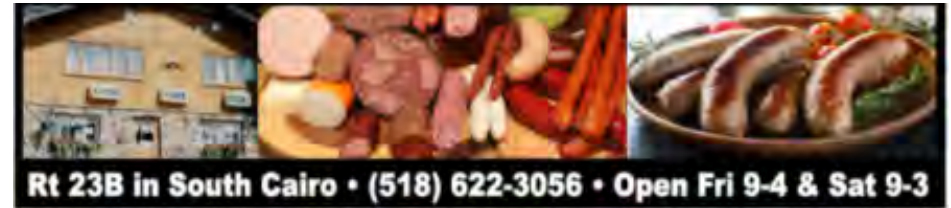
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With any luck we will cover the western half of Cantine's map next week for all of you on the Mountain Top, and don't forget to come out to West Kill on Saturday at two!



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Cantine's 1798 map

August 5, 2024

used to track the passage of time

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
August 12, 2021

The other half of Cantine's map



This detail from John Cantine's 1798 Map of the Town of Catskill shows North-South Lake labeled as the "Head of the Caders Creek" and includes a building nearby its banks possibly used by John Ashley to manufacture spruce beer. The Ulster-Albany County Line cuts between the lakes along the route of an old road.

First, a big thank you to all who attended the dedication of the Roadside History Marker for Levi Hill in West Kill last weekend! Credit for a delightful afternoon goes to Lexington Town Historian Mary Palazzolo and Deputy Historian Chris Dwon for their efforts organizing the event and reception — "a good time was had by all."

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This week I'd like to cover the second half of John Cantine's 1798 Map of the Town of Catskill. Though the western segment isn't as jam-packed with interesting sights as the eastern portion we covered last week it is still an equally fascinating window into the cultural landscape of Catskill immediately prior to the formation of Greene County in 1800. To view the full second half of the map visit the following link for the digital version through the New York State Archives: <https://digitalcollections.archives.nysed.gov/index.php/Detail/objects/36924>

Starting at the eastern or right side of the map a few points of interest are immediately apparent. First is the route of the Town's southern boundary which, after proceeding westerly from the Hudson River at the Embought, reaches a point at the center of the small spit of land which once divided North and South Lake. From that point the line proceeds westerly on a slight adjustment where it ends at a point in the woods west of the Pleasant Valley Cemetery in Ashland, probably somewhere near modern Campbell Road.

This southern boundary intersects several roads, the strangest of which is shown halfway between North-South Lake and Pleasant Valley. The road terminates just north of the boundary line at a small cluster of cabins which Cantine carefully drew in. This small settlement seems like it could probably be somewhere in the East Kill Valley around East Jewett, and the road shown reaching it could be a spur of the old road that ran up Kaaterskill Clove which had been improved as a short-lived turnpike in the 1790s. It may also have been an extension of the road from Mink Hollow, though the map doesn't show enough detail to confirm either possibility. Resolving the conjectures I've made will take much more study.

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Two weeks ago, in my essay “On The Mountain Top” I covered an explanation of the westernmost corner of this map where Medad Hunt’s farm and tavern stand was shown in Pleasant Valley. The year after this map was made Medad Hunt donated land nearby to create the first meeting house in old Windham. More extensive write-ups on this history appear in Rev. Henry Hedges Prout’s “Old Times in Windham” series which originally appeared in the Windham Journal in the 1870s and was published as a compilation by Hope Farm Press in the 1960s.

No details are shown along the northern boundary moving west to east across the map until it reaches a cluster of roads at its far right edge near the Shingle Kill in modern Cairo. This lack of detail can be explained in part by the boundary intersecting a lengthy stretch of inhospitable terrain along the escarpment of the Catskills. The roads and hamlet shown at the eastern side of the map are actually back down in the valley, though to look at the map one would never know there were any mountains or other geographic features sans the few creeks and streams Cantine added for reference. I’m at a loss as to why he decided to eliminate such definitive geographic features, but it may be that he decided not to include the mountains because he had no accurate survey of them to base his rendition on.

Down in the valley the hamlet of Kiskatom (later Lawrenceville) is drawn in northeast of North-South Lake and is described as the “Settlement at Kiskatammiska.” This name is one of the many attempts to derive a phonetic spelling of a name applied to what was variously called the Kiskataminiska Patent granted to Henry Beekman and Gilbert Livingston in the 1710s. The original patent covered a stretch of several hundred acres north of Palenville running below the escarpment of the Catskills. This land was divided and leased by the Beekmans and Livingstons prior to the Revolution, so the homes and settlement shown here, unlike the ones on the

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the homes and settlement shown here, unlike the ones on the Mountain Top, were relatively well established and several decades old by that time.

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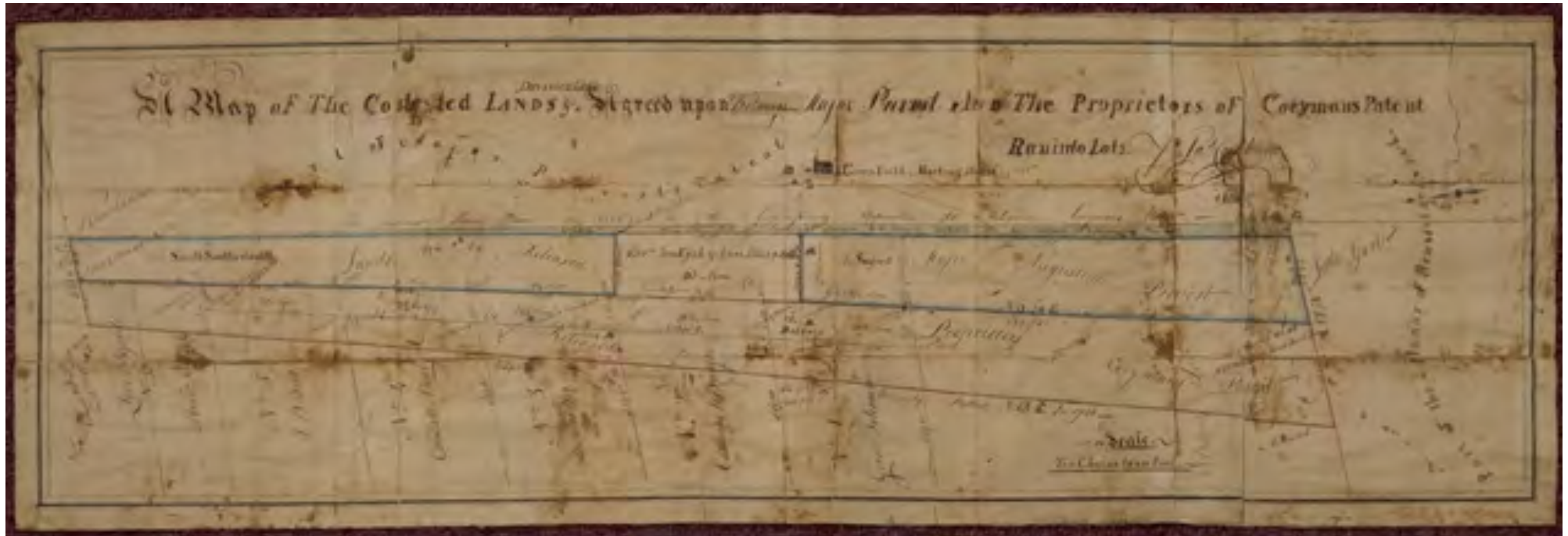
The other half of Cantine's map

August 18, 2024

used to track the passage of time

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
August 17, 2021

An old map from Greenville



This map from the collections of the Greene County Historical Society shows the settled lines of a disputed tract of land in Greenville in 1803 which was claimed by both Major Augustine Prevost and the proprietors of the Coeymans Patent.

This week briefly features on a map in the collections of the Greene County Historical Society's Vedder Research Library.

August 12, 2021

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August 5, 2021

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July 27, 2021

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The map was produced to show the delineation of a gore (a term applied in mapmaking to segments of land) which was disputed between Major Augustine Prevost and the proprietors of the bordering Coeymans Patent.

The map shows in great detail the cultural composition of the vicinity of the gore as surveyed by James Cockburn (son of colonial surveyor William Cockburn) in 1803. The settling of an accurate division of this disputed strip was just one of many episodes in the seemingly unending saga which played out after the Revolution on the "Prevost Patent." Prevost's land grant was originally awarded to Major Prevost's father, Major General Augustine Prevost, for service to the Crown in the Seven Years War.

Major General Prevost would go on to command British forces in the South during the American Revolution, winning the English a stunning victory against a combined French and American force during the Siege of Savannah in 1779.

To the surprise of many, Major Prevost was permitted to retain his father's land grant in Greenville after the close of the American Revolution despite the family's well-known exploits as officers in the British Army.

Following the war many other former Tories in New York saw their property confiscated, sometimes under dubious circumstances. General Prevost himself had already returned to England, leaving the family's Greenville land to his son. Why Major Prevost was able to retain the land grant can probably be blamed in part on the death of his uncle Mark Prevost and the subsequent marriage of Mark's widow Theodosia to none other than Aaron Burr.

Burr's many influential connections may have been a factor in Prevost's retention of the patent, and legend claims he assisted Major Prevost in settling legal disputes with the many



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assisted major effort in settling legal disputes with the many squatters who are shown as tenants on this 1803 map.

Those squatters had originally arrived from Connecticut anticipating the land becoming available following its confiscation from this infamous Tory family. Much to their dismay they ended up renting land they had worked hard to clear for themselves in anticipation of being able to stake a new claim following the formation the new nation.

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The Noon-Mark

A noon-mark is a traditional method used to track the passage of time



used to track the passage of time

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
August 24, 2021

An old lime kiln

This week's image is a snapshot from the collections of the Greene County Historical Society's Vedder Research Library showing an old lime kiln on Lime Kiln Road in New Baltimore.

The image was taken some time around 1920 when the area was noticeably less forested and shows what is probably the photographer's car parked close by along the road. Notable is that the wooden roof over the kiln's draw arch is still intact, as such features on utilitarian structures like this often rotted and fell away within years of abandonment. This feature may indicate how relatively recent the kiln was abandoned and testifies to both the kiln's appearance and what the working conditions for laborers attending it would have been like when it was in operation.

The history of this region's economic geology focuses heavily on the bluestone and clay industries - we've all most certainly heard of the celebrated and extensive brick industry which alongside the bluestone quarries of the Catskills built and paved New York City. Less celebrated, but perhaps equally responsible for considerable economic and cultural impact on this area, are the industries related to the use of our area's rich limestone deposits. Catskill, Athens, Coxsackie, and New Baltimore rest along a varied band of limestone known as the "Kalkberg," and the limestone it contains remains a valued natural resource to the present day.

Originally utilized as a durable building material, by the early 19th century limestone was being quarried in this area to



A photo of the c. 1850 lime kiln near the Houghtaling Farm on Lime Kiln Road in New Baltimore probably taken around 1920-1925. Collections of the Vedder Research Library.

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19th century limestone was being quarried in this area to produce calcium oxide (quicklime) in kilns like the one in this article's picture. Quicklime could be used for a wide variety of applications including the making of plaster and mortar, as a hardening agent for roadbuilding, and as an additive to fields which could increase crop yield. The firing of limestone to create reactive calcium oxide is a tradition that dates back thousands of years, so the appearance of lime kilns in this area is less indicative of a new innovation and likely shows that increases in regional demand for quicklime for agricultural and industrial uses had only recently made quarrying and firing limestone here economical on a larger scale. Maps and letters from the mid-19th century illustrate that lime kilns were a common feature which dotted backcountry farms in Athens, Cocksackie, and New Baltimore. Though once numerous, only the most substantially built of these kilns survive to the present day as ruins which can be studied.

The kiln shown in this picture is of a style common in the 19th century in Europe and America, though whether its interior structure was devised to allow perpetual or intermittent operation of the kiln cannot be discerned as the interior chamber has collapsed. On a perpetual kiln fuel and stone could be loaded in the top layer by layer while burned stone was drawn out the bottom by workmen tending the kiln. On a periodic kiln stone would be loaded from the top and positioned to create a void in the bottom chamber or "draw hole" which allowed workmen to feed and stoke a fire from below which would burn stone one load at a time. This latter process required one load to be fully fired before more stone was added. Either method produced a hot and uncomfortable working environment which had to be tended day and night, and the quicklime drawn from the fire was an irritant that could cause lasting harm to the eyes and respiratory system if not handled cautiously.

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The advent of industrialized manufacture of Portland cement ushered in a new era of processing techniques that saw the use of small lime kilns in our area fall by the wayside. While kilns like this fell into disuse, the limestone deposits which once fed them were quarried using increasingly larger scale industrial techniques. This is most apparent in the southern part of the Town of Catskill where large Portland cement manufacturers began removing limestone from vast quarries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The scale of those operations has drastically and permanently changed the physical landscape, and labor demands facilitated the creation of new immigrant communities based around these operations.

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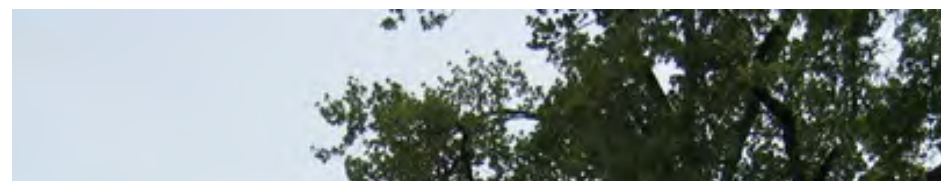
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used to track the passage of time

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
August 31, 2021

Persevere and preserve

The tenth anniversary of Hurricane Irene has come and gone, marked by the grand reopening of the Zadock Pratt Museum in Prattsville paired with a community-wide two day "Still Afloat" Celebration. For Prattsville this anniversary weekend wasn't so much about remembering (who could forget) as it was about proving to the world that they made it through against all odds. Ten years ago Prattsville was a muddy ruin featured on the nightly news as the poster child for a storm that nobody anticipated the severity of. Viewers watched news coverage questioning whether such devastation could ever be repaired. For those of us in the heritage community the incalculable damage wrought on the historic collections of the Zadock Pratt Museum stung deeply; the storm had simultaneously obliterated Prattsville's present as well as its past. How could any community ever be rebuilt without the artifacts that preserved and embodied their sense of self?

Folks in Prattsville and elsewhere across the Mountaintop proved all doubts wrong. Historic buildings were saved, roads were reopened, and what couldn't be salvaged was rebuilt anew. A decade later only one threat remains - that we might lose the documentation which preserves part of our memory of the storm. With the reopening of the Pratt Museum perhaps the best way for all of us to join the celebration is to ensure our personal memories of the storm are preserved and accessible for future generations.



This snapshot of the rising flood waters on Catskill Creek is one of a selection pictures of Hurricane Irene which I misplaced on an old flash drive for several years. Ten years later the clock is ticking for people to take action by preserving and backing up digital content that tells the story of this historic storm.

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are preserved and accessible for future generations.

I was 19 during Irene and a dock attendant at Catskill Marina. While my memory of the storm and its aftermath are very clear, the photos I took are in danger of being lost for good. Like most of us in 2011 I carried around a cameraphone which took photos that were only slightly better quality than your typical images of bigfoot and UFOs. They were grainy, pixelated, and looked okay on a small screen if you squinted. Unfortunately for many of us those cameraphone pictures and snapshots from now-defunct point-and-shoot digital cameras are the only images we have of that terrible event, and digital content like those photos present a considerable preservation risk.

I'm sure all of us have experienced a computer crash over the years that resulted in loss of documents and files, or perhaps you've simply misplaced a file or folder on a computer and couldn't find it. I've accidentally deleted my only copies of papers and images without realizing it, and I've also lost material because I didn't back it up. Without careful management and accurate description of your digital files all it takes is one mistake and your entire folder of Hurricane Irene photos might end up deleted, which is why this tenth anniversary is as good a time as ever to sit down and comb your old computers, thumb drives, and memory cards to assemble and start proactively saving those images for posterity.

What is the best way to go about this? Assuming you can find cables and card readers to physically access your images on old phones, cameras, and computers the next step is to create clearly labeled files and clearly labeled backups. Sometimes it's helpful to add a text file or PDF to your image folders simply describing batches of photos so anyone who views it later on can gather some context. The next step is to back the material up correctly. Avoid putting things on CDs

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and flash memory (thumb drives and memory cards) because of the susceptibility of those types of memory to physical degradation and bit rot. Instead find a backup hard drive through an electronics retailer and buy two of the correct size you need. Assuming you already have a regular computer backup drive, use these two new ones as backups for specific files instead of your entire operating system by plugging them in and copying over the things you want. Keep those hard drives in separate places and check and update them with additional files as needed. You'll find that staying on top of your backlog of old photos can be very rewarding if you haven't done so yet.

With any luck the time you take now to save those photos will pay off for those attending the 25th anniversary of the Hurricane and the commemorative events that follow. Prattsville persevered, now it's time for us to preserve.

If you need suggestions or help with your efforts to save your old digital content, I'm happy to lend input and make recommendations. Just email me at archivist@gchistory.org

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By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
September 8, 2021

A view from Broome Street



View from Broome Street looking over West Bridge towards the brick yards where Catskill Middle and High School now stand. The West Shore Railroad Viaduct is visible in the distance (with a blurred train crossing it) and appears as it did before its major 1902

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reconstruction. Of note is the partially dug out hillside just beyond the brickyard which was being excavated for clay. That spot is roughly the location of the Catskill School District's current athletic complex. This photo was likely taken by S. E. Davis around 1896 and is from the Hazelton Collection, Vedder Research Library.

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When will it be digitized?!



This image shows some of the containers for the Becker-Marafioti Collection at the Vedder Library. Finding aids for this collection and many others in the care of the Greene County Historical Society can be found on our collections catalog through vedderresearchlibrary.org

Ask any archivist what question they receive the most, and the answer will invariably be some variation of: "when are you going to digitize all of this?" I field that question from people every week, and the lengthy answer is always a hybrid in which I attempt to meter expectations, teach something about digitizing material, and explain a timetable for a facility the size of the Vedder Library.

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What it all comes down to is this: no, we aren't going to digitize everything. If I were to suddenly kidnap an IT Team and barricade myself with them in the Vedder for the next 15 years we might ostensibly make some progress—but even with a locked doors digitization-only workflow it would take a literal lifetime to get it all online, and even then the project would not be “done.”

Digitization is far more than taking a picture of something or scanning it and slapping it on a website. Done correctly, digitization is actually a process that involves preparing materials so they can be scanned, scanning items to make digital objects, creating descriptive information for the digital objects and originals, storing the original items so they can be readily retrieved on request (and for re-digitization later if necessary), uploading the digital object to a content management system, backing up that content management system, running checks and doing maintenance on that system to maintain the integrity of the digital materials, and publishing those materials to a digital library so that researchers can understand the context and relationship of collections of digitized material. Heaven forbid you need to update software.

Digitizing a collection takes much longer than simply processing a collection, so for paper materials at the Vedder I've instead set the goal of improving our public catalogs by making descriptive finding aids available online. For a larger collection this can take months, but digitizing the material would take years, so we end up with a much larger inventory of useful material by writing dozens of finding aids for different collections in the same amount of time it would take me to digitize one of them. The information in these finding aids can also serve as the foundations of description for digitized materials down the road, so perhaps it is best to call this as a “measure twice, cut once” sort of approach.

Our photo collections are a different story. You may not be terribly surprised to hear that people like looking at pictures. This, and the fact that photographs convey far more information than one can catalog in a concise way, means that in a reference setting it's really best to just have people look at an image for themselves. Photo collections get handled more frequently, are in higher demand, and are generally more compelling to a wider audience than manuscript material also—meaning that digitizing them and getting them available online is generally a far higher priority than it is with collections of papers.

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To that end, I had the pleasure last week of meeting with a small team at Marist College that is part of this year's Computer Science capstone project. Every year seniors in the School of Computer Science work on a capstone project in which they get practical experience working with client organizations in the Hudson Valley to develop and improve IT solutions for various needs. The Vedder Research Library has worked with two previous capstone groups, and this year the goal is to conduct research and lay the groundwork for a content management system which will eventually get the photographic collections of the Vedder accessible online.

We don't have a clear timetable yet, but perhaps this gives you a better picture of why my answer is always so long when folks ask about digitizing stuff.

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Two typical stereographs of the late 1860s and early 1870s by E. and H. T. Anthony & Co. showing Catskill Mountain scenery. The lower winter scene is from a remarkable series of pictures showing ice formations around the vicinity of Kaaterskill Falls and the Laurel House.

Rapid advancements and innovation continuously redefined the field of photography throughout the mid-19th century. Improvements in camera and lens designs, changes in chemistry and technique, and the ever-growing appetite of the viewing public for affordable quality images drove photography from fringe curiosity to the forefront of mass media within twenty years of its introduction.

In the Catskills, photographic advancement manifested itself most clearly in the sudden availability of mass-printed stereo views showing the region's mountain scenery. Several companies began selling these in the 1860s, having found the ability to satisfy demand by adopting albumen print techniques. The albumen print, which really came into its own after the Civil War, allowed photographers to make multiple high-fidelity copies of a single exposed glass photographic plate using a method very similar in spirit to modern film printing techniques. This meant that it was finally economical for regional photographers to reproduce and mass-market scenery images that had once been time-consuming diversions from lucrative studio work.

These "stereographs" were a fascinating product. Using a stereo camera, two lenses would simultaneously expose subtly different angles of the same scene on a wet or dry plate to create a negative. Using two lenses spaced roughly 6cm apart meant the camera was "seeing" much the same way the eyes in our heads do. This spacing allows us to perceive the world in three dimensions. Once prints were made from the negative and mounted on sturdy card

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backings it was possible for the public to buy these stereographs affordably and view the cards in special stereoscopes which almost magically transformed the two stereo images into one three-dimensional rendition. The effect is startling while elegantly simple.

Among the most prolific of the firms creating and publishing stereographs of the Catskills were Edward and Henry T. Anthony (E. and H. T. Anthony & Co.) of New York and John Jacob Loeffler of Staten Island. By all indications the Anthony brothers were the earliest of the two, but their portfolio was far more encompassing than just selling scenery of the Catskills. They funded and published some of Matthew Brady's work during the Civil War, and sourced images from across the country in an effort to appeal to a broad audience who may not have necessarily had the money to travel but had the money for a stereograph. Edward and Henry Anthony's main source of income was in the sale of photographic supplies, and they were one of the largest US-based sellers in the mid-19th century.

The earliest of the Anthony brothers' Catskill Mountain scenery may date to the Civil War, but their work, much like that of J. Loeffler, is exceedingly difficult to precisely date. This is because much of their promotions, sales material, and business records no longer exists or are otherwise inaccessible — so while we know they most certainly had a collectible stereograph series called "Glens of the Catskills," we don't know precisely when they first advertised it or when they took the pictures to create the series. In many cases older images from other series could be incorporated into new collectible series, meaning an image originally published in the late 1860s could still be making the rounds in the 1880s if it was a good seller.

The Getty Museum dates some of E. and H. T. Anthony's stereographs as early as the beginning of the 1860s, meaning



An advertisement for a smoke shop. It features a central image of a wooden barrel with a pump handle, labeled "DISCOUNT BEVERAGE" and "TOBACCO". To the left, it says "NEW ARRIVALS!". To the right, it says "Come Visit Our Smoke Shop!". Below the barrel, it lists "CBD Oils, Pipes, Pens, Cigars & More", "Direct Buy Tobacco \$6.99 60z Bag", "SODA • BEER • HARD CIDER", "WINE COOLERS • ICE • GROCERY ITEMS", and "GERMAN IMPORT BEERS • LOCAL CRAFT BEERS". A starburst graphic on the right says "LOW PRICES". At the bottom, it says "256 Main Street • Cairo, NY • Across from Hannaford • Open Daily 9-9 • 518-719-3871".

An advertisement for an insurance agency. It features a background image of a couple standing in a field, looking at a sunset. The text reads: "Insure Your Dreams", "From Farms to Contractors, Personal to Business, the Frisbee Agency will help guide you with your insurance needs", and "The Frisbee Agency, Inc. • 384B Main Street, Catskill • 518-943-3333".

An advertisement for a bar and grill. It features a background image of a wooden wall with string lights and a red rose. The text reads: "Red Rooster", "Bar & Grill", "Now Booking", and "Events & Parties".

that at least a selection of the Anthony portfolio was created using wet collodion plates that had to be prepared, exposed, and fixed on-site in the woods where the picture was taken. Their groundbreaking and unusual winter scenery, which they published several versions of in the 1870s, were probably done using dry plates which would have been far more forgiving in freezing temperatures. In fact the advent of dry plate stock in the early 1870s may have been the only thing that made their very novel winter series of stereographs possible, hence their appearance following the invention of dry photographic plates.

John Jacob Loeffler's work in the Catskills, while more or less concurrent with the Anthony Brothers, is even more difficult to date because there is comparatively much less information available about him. Next week I'll discuss the spirit behind his stereographs, how they differ from the Anthony Brothers, and pin down the location of one of his scenes.

Questions and comments can be directed to Jon at archivist@gchistory.org



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Stereographs of the Catskills

used to track the passage of time

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
October 5, 2021

Commemorating Camp Jened



This past Saturday, October 2, the Mountain Top Historical Society hosted a very special Roadside History Marker dedication commemorating Camp Jened on Ski Bowl Road in Hunter.

This summer camp operated from 1951 through 1977, providing expanded social and recreation opportunities for

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people with disabilities.

The staff and campers at Camp Jened helped cultivate a movement which shifted cultural paradigms to emphasize inclusiveness and access while simultaneously empowering disabled people to lead more independent lives. Alumni of Camp Jened would go on to participate in groundbreaking activism throughout the 1970s and 1980s which culminated in the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Little trace remains of the camp today, but at Saturday's event many former staff and campers shared their stories of this remarkable facility to remind all that Camp Jened endures as a philosophy for those who attended. Unlike many history markers across Greene County, this one was privately funded through the generosity of community members on the Mountaintop and the board of the Mountain Top Historical Society, all of whom will no doubt agree that history marker dedications are always best when those who want to commemorate history are joined by those who made history.

The picture with this passage shows former staff and campers posed with the new roadside marker. For those who want to know more about Camp Jened, please seek out the Oscar-nominated documentary "Crip Camp" on Netflix. Trailers for this documentary can be found on YouTube.

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used to track the passage of time

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
October 20, 2021

A Palenville footbridge



J. Loeffler's Stereograph "[Number] 297, Foot Bridge, Near Griffin's Store, Palenville [sic]" from Catskill Mountain Scenery, Fourth Series. Undated but likely circa 1870. Image PC-0000-0021-0068, Vedder Research Library.

E. & H. T. Anthony & Company's dominance in the Stereoviews market in the years following the Civil War left plenty of room for niche photographers to make their mark. John Jacob Loeffler of Tompkinsville, Staten Island, was one such practitioner who availed himself of the chance to compose stereographs of scenes sometimes off the beaten path and overlooked by his peers.

Across the Catskills Loeffler captured countless images of the majestic and mundane alike, creating what would become an authoritative

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and mundane alike, creating what would become an authoritative catalog of some of the most iconic corners of this celebrated vacationland. All indications seem to point to his catalog of work being considerable in scale, but relatively little is known of him and his artistry today. The Library of Congress offers seven images by him in their catalog, and a few miscellaneous websites purport to have scattered selections of his various stereographic series.

None of these resources offer definitive dates of publication for Loeffler's images or series, instead they offer broad circa dates covering the 1860s and 1870s. As discussed in my last article on the topic, dating stereographs so broadly over this date range has profound implications if one needs to understand the photographer's process and technique, because taking a picture in 1860 was a vastly different experience than it was even fifteen years later in 1875. The monumental changes that occurred in the development of the Northern Catskills following the Civil War also meant that within twenty years many published stereographs showed scenes that were gone or otherwise transformed beyond recognition. Add another century and score to that and historians looking at Loeffler's views are sometimes hard pressed to determine where a picture was taken, let alone a precise date of composition. One such example of a mysterious Loeffler image is a stereograph of a small pedestrian bridge in Palenville.

The scene is rather inconspicuous, as it shows a small crossing of the Kaaterskill Creek in a working-class corner of Palenville downstream from the Clove and its popular natural scenery. There are no mountains in the background, indicating that the scene looks downstream and eastward. None of the buildings are recognizable and were it not for the fact that the stereo card's reverse said "Foot Bridge, Near Griffin's Store, Palensville [sic]" one would be hard pressed to say the scene was in Palenville at all.

Fortunately, the clues given in Loeffler's description were enough to locate the general vicinity of "Griffin's Store" on the 1867 atlas map of the Town of Catskill. On that map appear several buildings and manufactories owned by "G. & S. T. Griffin" on both sides of the Kaaterskill north of the Malden Turnpike at the southeast end of the hamlet. One of the buildings they owned was a chair factory near the home of G. Griffin, several others may have been worker's housing, and one is shown as S. T. Griffin's (probably his house) nearby their store. Interestingly, a stone rubbing mill is nested alongside the Griffin complex on a small deadend path near the turnpike. No informal

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crossings like the one in the picture are shown on the 1867 atlas, but with businesses and family homes on both sides of the Kaaterskill creek it is not surprising that the Griffins may have had a foot bridge to allow workers and themselves easy access between properties.

In the 1865 Census of New York State both Giles Griffin and Samuel T. Griffin are listed as merchants and heads of households in Catskill's Third District. Theodore Teal, another Palenville resident, was the enumerator for the third district. Many of the people listed in Griffin's neighborhood were European immigrants, and the occupations given alongside their entries offer a window into the composition of the community around Samuel Griffin's house and store. One neighbor of Griffin's named Archibald Davis was a chair maker, possibly living in one of the homes shown near the chair factory; neighbors John Graff and Jacob Baslee were tanners who may have been employed at the tannery opposite their homes over the wooden footbridge in Loeffler's stereograph; also close by were James and Isaac Newkirk, stonecutters. Margaret Herald, the 38-year-old German wife of Augustus Herald (himself age 48 and from Russia), gave her occupation as "Tanner" as the only employed member of their household. All of these people living near Griffin's Store and the wooden footbridge seem to have worked within view of their front doors.

On a preceding page we find Giles Griffin, also a merchant, living alongside wood turners Aaron Smith and Albert Craft. Two other neighbors named John Mower and Peter Craft were stonecutters. The stonecutters who lived near Giles and Samuel are most intriguing, as it was likely all these men were either employed in nearby bluestone quarries or at the stone rubbing mill near Griffin's store itself. Stone rubbing mills were a facility for finishing quarried bluestone before reaching market, though they were often run by middlemen and located near docks on the Hudson.

A NYS Museum Bulletin from 1903 describes in considerable detail the operation of bluestone quarries in the northern Catskills — listing different grades and types of bluestone, their uses, and the finishing processes used to make the stone marketable. It is possible that the one in Palenville was devised to cut out middlemen at the river landings and help get quarrymen more revenue for their work. Whatever its objective, this stone rubbing mill helps definitively place Loeffler's stereograph of the footbridge, because in the background to the right on both views can be seen piled bluestone and tailings which



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would have been typical of the reduction debris and unprocessed stock seen at a rubbing mill.

What remains unknown is a precise date for Loeffler's scene because the rubbing mill in the 1867 atlas may have operated for several years prior and subsequent to the atlas' publication and there are no other features shown which would narrow the date beyond the period between 1865 and 1875. We do however have a much clearer idea of the exact location of this scene as well as the social makeup of the neighborhood around Loeffler's footbridge. It is interesting that Loeffler, in a departure from typical stereographs showing scenes of natural beauty, prominent buildings, and locales often only accessible to people of means, would decide to compose a view of a rustic and utilitarian footbridge in a predominantly immigrant neighborhood of a working-class Catskill Mountain hamlet.

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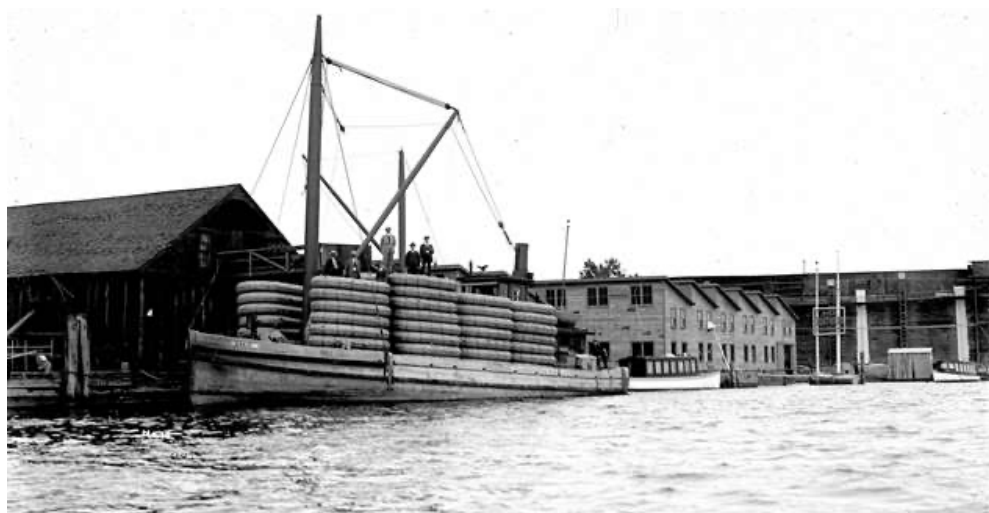
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A Palenville footbridge

used to track the passage of time

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
November 16, 2021

The David of Athens



This week I'm featuring a fascinating image by Paul Morrison showing the new plant of the Athens Shipbuilding Corporation (building with the sawtooth roofline) and the freightliner DAVID docked with a shipment of Athens-built life rafts stacked high on its deck circa 1919.

The image is one of a selection of negatives which were forgotten in the attic of Paul Morrison's Catskill home and purchased a number of years ago at a yard sale by professor and celebrated filmmaker Peggy Ahwesh. Professor Ahwesh recognized immediately not only the technical quality and skill evident in Morrison's work but also the remarkable documentary value of these nearly century-old scenes. The images she purchased turned out to be a selection of photographs Morrison took showing the Athens Shipbuilding

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photographs Morrison took showing the Athens Shipbuilding Corporation, the L. B. Harrison Shipyard, and the Alsen Portland Cement Company of America.

Whether Morrison took these images as an agent involved in the sale of these facilities or as a photographer retained by each company is not known, but the scenes he captured now represent some of the most detailed and in-depth visual studies of these three significant local manufacturers. If some of this sounds familiar to a few of you readers, that is because the selection Professor Ahwesh saved were once part Morrison's large personal archive; the other half of which was donated to the permanent collections of the Vedder Research Library several decades ago.

The DAVID is an interesting vessel outside of the context of this photograph. This little steamboat was used in the early 20th century for freight shipping - moving goods to various points ranging between Albany and New York City under the ownership of David Whiting and Eddie Van Loan of Athens.

According to a 1940 article by Samuel Van Aken, a local Hudson River history buff, the DAVID was actually named the CHARLES LYNCH prior to 1902 and was in fact originally constructed in 1835 at Mount Pleasant in Ulster County as a traditional Hudson River Sloop. The LYNCH served many years as a bluestone boat, carrying this celebrated regional product from ports by the Catskill Mountains to a ready market in New York City. In 1892 the boat was sold to a Kingston businessman who had the boat hauled for conversion to a steamboat. The process was completed for the 1893 season when the LYNCH was relaunched and re-registered as a steam vessel with one of its masts converted to support a gantry crane.

The CHARLES LYNCH was renamed DAVID upon its sale to Van Loon and Whiting, and remained so named through



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subsequent sales to the Athens Shipbuilding Company, Seth Hallstead, and lastly to Benjamin Plusch. In 1930 Mr. Plusch, after operating the tired out old vessel for a short while, beached the DAVID along Catskill Point and finally put the 95-year-old ship out to pasture. Subsequent fill buried the CHARLES LYNCH/DAVID beneath Catskill Point sometime before 1940, forever encasing the boat in the ground along lower Main Street probably in the vicinity of the Main Care fuel terminal and Riverview Marine. In this photo of the DAVID, composed while in service with Athens Shipbuilding, the antiquated lines of the hull and repurposed mast can be clearly observed. This image is one of a large trove of digital scans donated by Peggy Ahwesh to the Historical Society to complement the existing collection we have of Morrison's work.

Questions and comments can be directed to Jon via archivist@gchistory.org

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By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
November 24, 2021

The haunted sloop



The CLEARWATER, a modern North River Sloop of 70 tons, retains the traditional lines of this unique style of vessel. The MARTIN WYNKOOP, a sloop which sailed the Hudson in the 19th century, was plagued by hauntings most of its career and would have looked exactly like the CLEARWATER with larger dimensions.

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The tradition of “witch doctoring” in the Catskills dates to the earliest days of European settlement in the unforgiving valleys and hollows of our celebrated mountains. Numerous sources, notably from Schoharie and Ulster Counties, detail the exploits of this peculiar regional flavor of supernatural healers — earnest folk endowed with remarkable powers which were always leveraged for the benefit of their far-flung neighbors.

These so called “witch doctors,” as Alf Evers describes in his book *The Catskills*, were lauded as curious but valued members of the communities they ministered to. In essence, they were “good” witches.

The abject oddness of this regional phenomenon cannot be understated. The exploits of several of the Catskills’ witch doctors in the years after the Revolution occurred a mere two hundred miles from the Massachusetts Bay region where a century prior a fit of mass hysteria led to the execution of nineteen people on suspicion of being witches. There are myriad reasons for the strange tolerance of Catskill Mountain communities towards the witches who lived alongside them, and the influence of Palatine German and Dutch cultural values cannot be understated, but at the end of the day the reality of this phenomenon still almost defies credulity.

Dr. Jacob Brink, who wasn’t an actual MD by any stretch of the imagination, is perhaps the most famous of the witch doctors who practiced in the Catskills. Mr. Evers cites numerous stories and written accounts of the fantastical exploits of the “Old Doctor”— from “chasing the witches” out of butter churns that produced sour butter, to speaking and laying on hands to cure an illness, and even stopping a hemorrhage through incantations while miles away from the bleeding victim.

These stories were all remarkable, but the one that takes the cake was Doctor Brink’s ministrations over the North River Sloop *MARTIN WYNKOOP*, a reviled hulk of a ship which was plagued for all its years by spirits and dark forces. That Doctor Brink’s storied career and the tale of the *MARTIN WYNKOOP* should overlap is a fascinating crossover which lends a certain degree of authenticity to an otherwise fantastical legend.

Folk tales like those which have grown over the last two centuries concerning Doctor Brink’s exploits and the tribulations of the *MARTIN WYNKOOP*

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WYNKOOP are difficult things to grapple with. They are always furnished by tellers as the truth and have grown and transformed with the telling like a knotted old yellow birch on a mountainside. Like the birch these tales are lovely to witness, but their roots are sometimes obscure and far-reaching.

At the archives of the old Senate House in Kingston one of the roots of this particular tale lay hidden in the pages of a diary from 1850. This diary, one of several kept by Mr. Nathaniel Booth of Twaalfskill, is in and of itself an absolutely astounding piece of writing, but within its pages appears one of the earliest written accounts of the MARTIN WYNKOOP, its haunting, and Doctor Brink's attempts to cure the ship.

The MARTIN WYNKOOP was an actual sloop. Constructed at Kingston in 1822, the 113-ton vessel was enrolled at New York in 1823 probably while under the ownership of Kingston businessman Abraham Hasbrouck. According to resources not directly involved in perpetuating the WYNKOOP's legend, deckhand Zebre Simmons drowned while in service on board in the summer of 1826. He is the only verifiable human casualty of the MARTIN WYNKOOP.

Hasbrouck, already a wizened veteran of the merchant's line of business, decided to retire and divest himself of his buildings and wharf at Kingston Landing in 1829. The lengthy advertisement for his property ran in the New York Statesman in 1829 and 1830, the final paragraph reading: "The subscriber [Hasbrouck] also offers for sale, the sloop MARTIN WYNKOOP, in complete order. She is too well known on the river to need any particular description or recommendation." It is difficult to discern if Hasbrouck's advertisement is alluding to the eight-year-old sloop's widely regarded fame or infamy.

The MARTIN WYNKOOP falls out of the news for two decades following her sale, but reappears in 1850 following a collision with the schooner MARION which resulted in a lengthy and expensive court case among the respective owners. By many accounts the MARTIN WYNKOOP subsequently sank in New Jersey sometime in the 1880s, though even this is difficult to confirm.

Nathaniel Booth, finding himself on a wharf at Rondout on a deceptively springlike day in February of 1850, sat and listened to some of the boatmen gathered on the warm side of a warehouse trading stories. In his diary that night he related ten pages of what he heard regarding the MARTIN WYNKOOP, mostly furnished by one of the aged veterans of the river trade seated among his compatriots. Booth

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veterans of the river trade seated among his compatriots. Booth quoted the man: "she is haunted and there is no use talking about it. I have known her for thirty years and she has had ill luck all the time; she has never paid expenses, she has broke more legs and arms, ruined more freight and done more damage generally than any craft between Troy and New York. 'You don't believe this and you don't believe that' is all fudge — facts are stubborn things and what a man sees with his own eyes he is apt to believe in, and what he knows can't be argued out of him; and I know she is both unlucky and haunted."

More on the Hudson's most famous haunted sloop and Doctor Brink's efforts to cure her next week. Questions can be directed to Jon via archivist@gchistory.org

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A view from Broome Street

enter the beginning of the Christmas season and the 1, I figured it was a fair time to pause and take stock of which transpired over the Fall. Several of these updates familiar to you if you are a reader of the Greene County's Good Newsletter, and for those anticipating part two the MARTIN WYNKOOP you will have to wait until next folks had a chance to view part one in print following Holiday.

dder Research Library's blog has been updated with d more heavily illustrated versions of the pieces which al papers and online. You can view my blog versions of by visiting <https://vedderresearchlibrary.org/gc-> out please stay tuned in for the latest articles where you ady. The blog is for articles I feel like revisiting and strations to.

October, I was pleased to attend the annual meeting of f of the Catskill Tri-County Historical Views, a biannual hed by the Gilboa Museum and Juried History Center ation of heritage organizations from Greene, Delaware, ounties. These meetings serve to update stakeholders ie participating counties on circulation, solicitation of l guidelines and objectives, and other miscellaneous s meeting I can relay that this fantastic publication staining following its inception in 2018, and much icholas Juried for the seed funding and a subsequent ls the publication's rainy day fund. While I have done e past to aid authors with their pieces and prepare he Tri-County, I think it is high time I finally send along / own. If you have a local heritage piece you would like l as well you should feel free to reach out to the Tri- <https://www.catskilltricity.org/contact-us/>

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lications, those of you who are members of the Greene il Society should have received the highly anticipated 2021 Edition of the Quarterly Journal at the beginning his latest edition of the Quarterly Journal is the first ing of the guard in the Journal's editorship. Robert ong-time editor, has passed the torch to fellow Society uthor Jim Planck, whose scholarship many of our eady familiar with. Congratulations are due to both Mr. D'Agostino for the former's completion of their first latter's well-deserved retirement from the role after of guiding the Society's scholarly publication. With ditorship come changes in style, and the Society gladly ack on the Journal via journal@gchistory.org

work this fall, I have had the pleasure outside of as to give two informal morning seminars with the of the Thomas Cole National historic Site discussing ualize Cole in Catskill during the age of Jackson. he local political and social climate of Catskill during st important years of Cole's career helps shed light on ture of his home at Cedar Grove and the nature of the

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ture of his home at Cedar Grove and the nature of the e broadly where he made his home. The education ove is always in pursuit of opportunities to bring fresh new sources to light that help the public understand amous resident. A tour would be well worth anyone's ose: <https://thomascole.org/visit/>

hese meetings and my writing, I've had a few trips to e interesting maps at the Greene County Office Building and also made a trip to the Senate House in Kingston to el Booth's diary which is the backbone resource for the ompleted and forthcoming regarding the MARTIN also eagerly awaiting news on the availability of a map rgh Patent held by the Ulster County Historical Society, the history of one of the first roads cut to the Greene County. Another piece of that interesting story hile I was at the Senate House Museum's archives.

u with any interest, I will be available to chat "history iber 11 in Athens for their annual Victorian Stroll where a cemetery tour at 1:30 p.m. in the afternoon. A full events can be viewed through this link: lturalcenter.org/victorian-stroll


uestions can be sent to me via archivist@gchsitory.org



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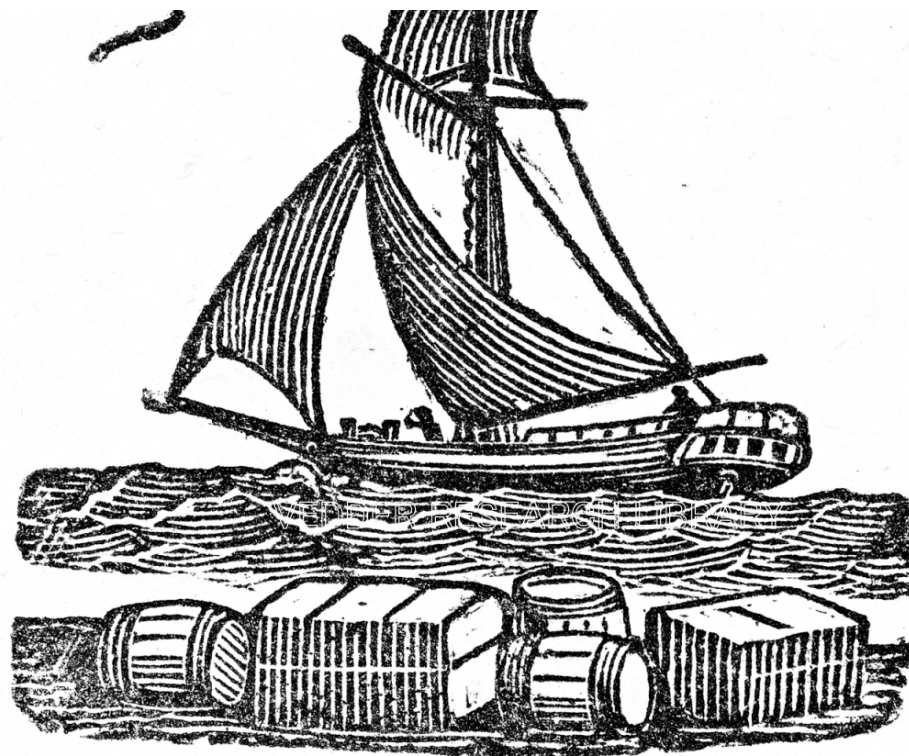
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
December 9, 2021

The haunted sloop, part II

The tribulations of the MARTIN WYNKOOP began in advance of her construction according to nearly every version of the tale handed down to the present time. Nathaniel Booth's diary account from 1850 is the earliest and most grounded of the variations; mentioning important verifiable facts of her ownership, notes of special incidents which can be corroborated in newspapers and letters, and overall bearing a particular maritime flare only the initiated teller could relay for posterity. What I mean to say is that Booth's account could only have been given him by an "old salt," and what these superstitious boatmen told Booth in February 1850 was their best attempt at the honest truth as they knew it.

By their account the curse began with the hunt for the MARTIN WYNKOOP's keel. The fastest sloops of that age were the ones with the stiffest construction, and a single solid beam to make up the backbone of the sloop was Abraham Hasbrouck's key to a quick boat and a quicker profit. Hasbrouck, apparently concerned with finding the best deal rather than the most fair, had recently cheated an old woman (by her reckoning) on a purchase she made of him. Booth's teller relates: "before the tree was cut the sloop was cussed by an old woman for some spite against the builder. Yes she put her cuss on it first and she never was lucky afterwards — the first accident was to the man looking for the tree: when he found it and was cutting it down it fell all of a sudden and killed him dead on the spot. Then the old woman cussed it again but they went on and built her, but when she was finished they could not get her off the stocks."

The WYNKOOP, probably measuring over sixty feet in length, certainly had gravity on its side the day it was to be launched. These sorts of



Graphic of a Hudson River sloop scanned from the enrollment papers of the 130-ton sloop ECLIPSE built at Coxsackie and owned by Anthony Livingston and Jacob Brandow of Athens in 1836.

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events were always precarious affairs. A large wooden vessel would be built in stocks on a slipway and upon completion the stocks would be removed and the ship would slide down to the water in short order. It was a more common mishap for a vessel to slide down the ways prematurely, sometimes harming the unsuspecting worker or passerby, than for a vessel to be stuck fast on an already inclined platform. Apparently the builders tried for a week to get the MARTIN WYNKOOP off the ways into the water, but no measure could make the sloop budge - it seemed the old woman's "cuss" was at work again, and so Dr. Jacob Brink was summoned.

Dr. Brink apparently thought nothing of applying his witch doctoring to a stuck sloop, for he arrived at the yard in short order. Booth's teller relates: "he came and made his signs and talked a long time to himself and by and by she went like a rush." The old doctor's ministrations were apparently so successful that the MARTIN WYNKOOP flew from the ways and almost sank in deep water before the wood planking had time to swell. This infamous start was an ill portend, and Booth's diary relates how the teller believed Abraham Hasbrouck's son was killed falling into the sloop's hold the first year the vessel was in service. This can't be confirmed, but one of Hasbrouck's sons did die young during the period Hasbrouck was trying to sell the WYNKOOP roughly six years later between 1829 and 1830. At any rate, the sloop's problems only accumulated as its career progressed, and crews began to witness stranger and stranger phenomenon while on board.

To start with the MARTIN WYNKOOP seemed to have a proclivity for disaster. Aside from verifiable collisions which went to court, the sloop also upset several times and lost cargo from her deck, sank once with a load of animal hides and once with a load of bluestone, smashed often into docks, "lost more rigging than she was worth," and displayed such irregular sailing characteristics that crewmen were injured by her every season. Indeed her sailing characteristics alone gave crewmen the impression the MARTIN WYNKOOP was possessed. The sloop would sometimes refuse to budge under sail on windy days, and on windless days take off like a shot to the surprise of the unsuspecting crew. Captain Young, one of her many hapless commanders, relayed in a personal log of the unsettling habit of the MARTIN WYNKOOP by which it would raise and lower rigging and anchor while the crew was asleep at night.

This was to say nothing of the apparitions, which aside from Nathaniel Booth's diary were also related in Clearwater's History of Ulster County, published in 1907: "The different crews of [the MARTIN WYNKOOP]

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published in 1907. The different crews of [the MARTIN WYNKOOP]... would go ashore at night to enjoy themselves, and on returning would find her lighted from stem to stern, and merry music and witches dancing to ghost time, and that all would vanish in darkness as soon as their boat touched the vessel's side." Indeed Booth's diary contains similar accounts of these apparitions manifesting on numerous occasions and much worse: in one instance a mountain lion appeared on board in the dark and vanished when the alarm was raised by the dismayed crewman on watch.

Dr. Brink ministered to the WYNKOOP at least one more time before he died in 1843, allegedly being summoned to Catskill to address one of the strangest incidents of the sloop's career. The Wynkoop had previously displayed a penchant for not sailing when the crew meant to sail her, and sailing when nobody was anticipating it. According to a note slipped into Booth's diary, the MARTIN WYNKOOP finally up and froze in place on a summer day in Catskill Creek and refused all efforts to budge her for several days.

The old doctor, who was already well known for his healing gift, occasionally resorted to using tools as an aid to his powers. Fresh butter was his preferred medium, using it on his finger to heal wounds and sicknesses, but by Alf Evers' account he also employed horseshoes, switches and sticks, and even cats to cure hexes and curses placed on hapless country folk by the witches who wished them ill. When he arrived at Catskill and was rowed out to the MARTIN WYNKOOP, Dr. Brink produced a switch and set about in short order beating the structure of the vessel from stem to stern in an effort chase away the invisible witches who were conspiring to hold the WYNKOOP fast in the creek. To the amazement of onlookers, splashes were heard in the water against the boat as he proceeded around the decks, and in a short time the MARTIN WYNKOOP was seen to drift - having been liberated from the clutches of the "cuss" for the second time in its career.

The saga of the MARTIN WYNKOOP and the life of Dr. Jacob Brink are each extensive narratives in and of themselves, and this rough paraphrase is a revisitation of the sources used by Alf Evers in his book The Catskills. For those interested to learn or read more about the intertwined stories related here I am happy to point you to a long list of sources, but a perusal of chapters 30-31 of The Catskills would do as much justice as anything else, being a "real hoot" of a read. Questions and comments can be directed to me via archivist@gchistory.org



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used to track the passage of time

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian
December 19, 2021

Oral history season

Surprise, surprise! The holidays are upon us. While I have no doubt most of us are thinking about important things like family gatherings, community events, church services, and presents under trees it is important to remember that this is also my favorite time of year: Oral History Season. There is no better time than the holidays to gather and talk bygone days with family and close friends, and there's also no better time to grab a recording device and save those talks for posterity.

I know; you'd love to do something like that with family members but the holidays are busy. Maybe you don't know where to start, or perhaps the problem is that you are dealing with someone who doesn't think they have anything important to say. "Bah, humbug!" to all of that. Recording oral histories has never been easier than it is now, and you shouldn't feel overwhelmed by wrongly assuming an oral history needs to be jam-packed with "important information everyone will want to know about." Take it from me as an historian: time proves even the most trivial things to be fantastic tidbits. If it seems like nobody is interested now, their tune will change in a few years and suddenly those recordings from Christmas 2021 will be magically transformed into a treasured possession. I've seen this happen countless times.

Where to start? Recording an oral history requires a recording device (who knew?!) and you might be surprised to know you likely already have an ideal recording device in your back pocket or purse. Most smartphones come built in with voice



This Tascam field recorder is one of my favorite seasonal decorations, but there are many device options available for you to record family oral histories with.

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memo apps. On apple devices this app is creatively named "Voice Memo" and on android you can find a number of variations depending on manufacturer usually called something like "Voice Recorder." If you really want to get serious and record some high-fidelity audio of family stories there are a limitless number of field recorders available through online retailers. I have a Tascam DR-05X which is relatively simple to use, but your cell phone honestly would work fine. Just be sure to try your recorder out and get to learn its controls so you know how it works!

Once you've got the recording device prepared, think about the setting that is going to be best to record in. Is there a place in the house where people generally gather after dinner or desert when stories start getting swapped? Is there a quiet time when you won't be interrupted for a one-on-one session with siblings, parents, or grandparents? Is there anyone who would rather throw your phone in the mashed potatoes than be interviewed on recording? All of these factors are important to consider, especially if you think it will aid or detract from the conversation you want to have with your subject. Sometimes more people in the room talking helps loosen things up and make it less formal, sometimes a quiet space is best for someone who has a lot to say and shouldn't be interrupted, and sometimes several people in conversation can help to shake loose some elusive memories. It is up to you and your subject to decide what is best.

Now, what to ask? Last I checked there aren't too many people still alive who knew George Washington, so unless you want to be thrown in the mashed potatoes along with your recorder I'd avoid asking your subject their memories of the founding fathers. However, this raises a good point to consider: this is your opportunity to learn more about the people you never knew. Ask your interviewee about their memories of the elders who were a part of their childhood and adolescence, or ask them about the places they frequented and the people they

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them about the places they frequented and the people they saw there. Don't limit the questions to just discussion of family! Maybe your subject was there the day Eleanor Roosevelt spoke at Catskill, or they remember how the clerk at the local store always recalled their favorite penny candy. Questions about these things are great to get the ball rolling, and unless you've come up with a very specific list of things to ask I'd say it is more fun to let the conversation flow from your starting point wherever it wants to go. If jogging loose a memory is proving tough, share a memory you've heard before and ask to hear it again, or start by talking about people you might have known in common.

Now, assuming you have found a willing subject and you spent hours talking with the recorder running - what do you do with all the audio you've recorded?! Most field recorders have a memory card you can remove and plug into a computer, and those files can be copied and pasted into a folder while you figure out how to share them. Don't use the memory card itself for long-term storage, because the files can corrupt over time or get erased accidentally. On your phone the recording app you selected will usually have a share function. This works great if you want to email the recording to yourself or send it to friends and family, but it is also safer to upload that file to a cloud storage space to ensure it doesn't get misplaced or lost when your phone falls in the mashed potatoes and breaks.

For files from a field recorder or files from your phone I'd recommend something simple like Google Drive or Dropbox as a place to upload audio recordings for posterity - from either of those services you can share with anyone you want, including the friendly faces at your local historical society who would be delighted to see your work and catalog it for future reference. Merry oral history season to all, and to all a good recording!

If you have questions or need help with files you've recorded I

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