

Greene County Historian
Annual Report for Calendar Year 2019

As in the past I spent 2019 responding to inquiries via letters, emails, texts and phone calls. I attempt to satisfy these requests or direct them to an individual or a group that can be of further assistance.

I have also continued to fulfill my responsibilities as County Historian by researching and writing a weekly history column called "Greene History Notes" which appears in *The Catskill Daily Mail* and the weekly *Mountain Eagle*. The columns help to promote an understanding of the rich history of the county and I have received many positive comments on them. Since I assumed this position in 2009, I have contributed almost 500 columns.

In 2017 I took on lead responsibility for ensuring the refurbishment and restoration of the 1706 Van Loon House in Athens. It is the oldest house in Athens and is owned by the Greene County Historical Society. After getting the building scraped and painted I identified a community group that is interested in working with the society to come up with a long term use for the interior of the building. Throughout 2018 and 2019 the group raised funding and accomplished a great deal on restoration of the interior. The building has been open to the public for several community events over the last two years. I continue to work as a liaison between the ad hoc Athens group and the Greene County Historical Society.

Last year I also spent a considerable amount of time as co-chair of a group working to restore the neglected Mansion Street Cemetery in Coxsackie. We have made an application to put it on the National Historic Register and should hear if it is accepted in 2020 – a very time consuming process. We also secured a New York State History marker from the Pomeroy Foundation valued at \$1,100 which was erected this year. Progress over time has included: Tree removal; grave stone cleaning, repair and straightening; a new flag pole and access improvement. As part of our fundraising, I organized a Murder Mystery Dinner Theater at Pegasus Restaurant that netted over \$4,000. Currently our efforts have concentrated on repairing and replacing the front fence along Mansion Street.

Another project I continued to work on in 2019 involved the reconstruction of a late 19th century 40' by 60' barn on the Bronck House complex. The structure originally stood about five miles from where it is being reassembled and would probably not have survived another winter. When completed the barn will house a rare 1880s working hay press and provide additional event, storage and exhibition space. Throughout the year I have continued to assist the barn committee with fund raising for the \$200,000 project. As of this writing, the barn is ninety-five percent reconstructed with only a portion of the siding left to put up.

In 2017 I was approached by the Editor of a new magazine; *Catskill Tri-County Historical Views*. The magazine is published twice a year. I was asked to be the County Editor for Greene County and accepted the position. Material in the magazine will promote an understanding and awareness of the historical and cultural importance of Delaware, Greene and Schoharie Counties. For the first issue which was published in the spring of 2018, I contributed a book review. For the second issue which came out in the fall, I contributed the lead article on the Clark family of Athens and Cooperstown. The spring 2020 edition will contain an article I wrote on the 1813 murder to Sally Hamilton in Athens.

In 2018 I became a member of the Coxsackie Historic District Commission. In addition I continue to serve as Chairman of the nominating committee for Coxsackie-Athens Foundation for Education. Finally, as a member of American Legion Post 166 in Coxsackie, I served as the liaison between our post and the Cairo Post in sponsoring a young man in the Legion's Constitution Speech Contest. Aiden Bohem from Coxsackie-Athens Central School was selected and went through three levels of competition to advance to competition for the New York State title on March 2, 2019. He placed in the top five state-wide and was awarded a \$2,000 cash prize.

I continued to serve as a resource for numerous individuals throughout the year and attend a number of events – particularly those sponsored by local history groups as they occur. Some of these included:

As a member, attended monthly meetings of the Coxsackie Historic District Committee. As co-chair of the Mansion Street Cemetery Restoration Committee, attended numerous meetings throughout the year.

Attended the American Legion District Oratorical Competition at Lisha Kill School (1/12/19).

Attended and networked at a lecture for the Ravena-Coeymans Historical Society (1/13/19).

Attended the American Legion Zone Oratorical Competition at Lake George School (2/2/19).

Attended the American Legion State Competition at Sand Lake School (3/2/19).

Attended 200th birthday celebration for Edwin Drake in Greenville (3/29/19).

Attended and represented position at a meeting about signage for the new Mawignack Preserve in Catskill (4/12/19).

Attended and networked at the Greene County Historical Society's Patriot's Day (5/19/19).

Attended and networked at an event honoring disabled veterans at Catskill Point (5/21/19).

Attended and worked at the Greene County Historical Society's tour of home in Cairo (6/1/19).

Made a presentation to the Greene County Legislature about creating a position of Deputy Greene County Historian (6/10/19).

Attended and networked at a lecture in Coxsackie on grape growing in the Hudson Valley (8/1/19).

Attended the NYS Association of Public Historians Annual Meeting in Albany (9/10/19).

Attended and networked at 50th anniversary for the Columbia-Greene Community College (9/17/19).

Attended and spoke at the Annual Pratt Museum Award Dinner (9/28/19).

Attended, worked and networked at the GCHS Heritage Craft Fair (10/6/19).

Along with Coxsackie Village Historian Betty Cure made a one hour presentation for local radio station WGXC on Mansion Street Cemetery restoration (11/19/19).

With regard to the tour of homes, for the past several years I have used my office to help the society gain financial support from local businesses. I have also been in touch with and supported activities by other historical societies from time-to-time throughout the year such as the Cairo Historical Society, the Windham Historical Society, the Pratt Museum and the Mountain Top Historical Society.

I continue to remain available to make presentations on Greene County History when called upon. In addition, from time to time I have served as a resource for media such as "The Hudson Valley Magazine", the "Kingston Daily Freeman" and "Columbia-Greene Media Newspapers." I also continue to keep in touch with town and village historians in Greene County and make myself available as a resource. I find them to be a very dedicated group.

Lastly, I regularly receive phone calls and e-mails from people with research and genealogy questions. I answer what I can or provide referrals if I cannot.

This year the County Legislature created the position of Deputy County Historian. The position has been filled by Jonathan Palmer, Archivist at the Vedder Research Library in Coxsackie. I anticipate that I will be vacating the position of County Historian in the next year or so. The creation of this position paves the way for a seamless transition. In his new position and as archivist Mr. Palmer has made numerous public presentations this year. In addition he has started a new free local history blog on the Vedder Library website. His articles have generated considerable interest.

Instructions for preparing this report in the past called for me to provide a comparison of my activity for the reporting year with that of the previous year. In answer to that, I first have to say that although requests for help and services vary, the type of things I do remains fairly static except when a particular anniversary is being observed. Based on the requirements set forth by the State of New York, I feel I am performing the mission of County Historian as prescribed and achieving a high degree of operational success. In terms of time spent at my job in 2019, hours spent were once again in the 500-600 range.

Respectfully Submitted

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Greene County Historian