

2022 Annual Report of Greene County Historian Submitted by Jonathan Palmer

Introduction:

This is my second Annual Report submitted as Greene County Historian for the term covering the period 1/1/2022 to 1/1/2023. This reporting period was defined by a resumption of many regular activities and public outreach subsequent to the end of restrictions imposed by the COVID 19 pandemic. During this reporting period I have either corresponded, provided reference assistance, or held in-person meetings with every municipal historian working in the fourteen towns and five villages that comprise Greene County excepting the Town and Village of Catskill, Halcott, and Cairo. The Villages of Hunter and Tannersville currently have no appointed historians.

Lectures and Presentations:

Total Attendees for public events and lectures: 460

This past year I expanded my lectures and outreach with several notable cemetery tours and several joint programs in partnership with other local historians and organizations, they are summarized as follows:

- April 2022 talk for the On-Ti-Ora chapter, DAR about current projects.
- April 2022 talk for the Athens Seniors Group about the early planned community of Esperanza.
- June 2022 Architecture walk in partnership with Meg Nowack/Cultivate Catskill touring a neighborhood around High/Cedar/Woodland Ave. in Catskill Village.
- June 2022 staffed a booth at Athens Community Day for the public to browse the Athens history scrapbook collection of Pat Martine newly donated to the Greene County Historical Society.
- June 2022 talk for the Greenville Local History Group about an early map of the Town of Freehold and other miscellaneous projects.
- June 2022 Gave a short address for the Hudson-Athens Lighthouse Preservation Society at their first annual fundraiser.
- June 2022 tour of Catskill Village Cemetery discussing the evolution of Rural Cemeteries in Greene County.
- August 2022 trial program hosting narrated boat tours on Catskill Creek in partnership with the Hudson River Maritime Museum using their solar powered tour boat *SOLARIS*.
- September 2022 Lecture hosted by Greene Land Trust on the legacy of Slavery on their headquarters property at the Willows/Brandow Point.
- October 2022 Tour of Coxsackie Village Cemetery to help raise funds for its maintenance and restoration.
- October 2022 Tour of Mount Hope Cemetery in Athens to help raise funds for maintenance and restoration.

In addition, this year saw a pilot program of “office hours” held once monthly at Catskill Point during the months of May, June, July, August, and September. This program was nominally successful and saw sporadic attendance. The program is being repeated in 2023 using Public Libraries as a way to utilize more accessible public locations. This office hours program generated one oral history interview and also anecdotally demonstrated the desire of the public to visit the small museum the County maintains at Catskill point concerning local maritime history. Simply having me down at the point to open the doors of the building drew people to the exhibits.

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 worked closely with several Fellows from the Thomas Cole National Historic Site on their ongoing efforts to develop interpretation about the auxiliary staff and enslaved people who lived at Cedar Grove. This included discussions, guiding them to new sources, and reference visits to the Greene County Historical Society.

Winslow Homer: American Passage by William R. Cross was published this past year with acknowledgments concerning my research efforts identifying the location of a painting Homer composed in Palenville in the 1870s.

The Lafayette Trail Marker commemorating the visit of the Marquis de Lafayette to Catskill during his 1824 Farewell Tour was installed on the front lawn of the Greene County Courthouse in September of 2022.

In October of this past year I was awarded Roadside History markers commemorating the sinking of the Steamboat *SWALLOW* and the Commissioning of the Hudson-Athens Lighthouse. These are to be installed in 2023.

I assisted approximately twenty 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.

I spent considerable time in the Clerk’s Office on Fridays during 2022 conducting deed searches to supplement different research topics. Many of these visits were done

jointly with new homeowners to demonstrate the process of tracing the lineage of their properties.

Scholarship/Publications:

This past year I completed approximately 30 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. As such, I see these writings as being relevant for inclusion as an annex to my submitted report

In addition, I also composed and mailed five “Historian’s Letters” using a new email list which reaches approximately 230 people who have signed up since the Summer of 2022.

END OF SUMMARY REPORT

Attached are typewritten versions of each article from 2022 as submitted for publication in regional newspapers, followed by the five historian’s letters sent to email list subscribers during 2022:

Cannibalism at the Catskill Mountain House
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

This past week I was reading essays from the Thomas Cole National Historic Site's exhibition catalog *Picturesque and Sublime* as part of some research on a short article I'm writing for future publication. Within the catalog was Sophie Lynford's fascinating essay titled "Idyllic and Industrial Visions: Thomas Cole, William Guy Wall, and the Hudson River." Interesting topic aside, one of Dr. Lynford's citations caught my attention and I had to track it down. She quoted a line from an 1828 book titled *The New Mirror for Travelers* in which the author, James Kirke Paulding, discusses the particular merits of outwardly very similar paintings by William Guy Wall and Thomas Cole showing Kaaterskill Falls. I had never heard of the book so I tracked down a free version of it online through Google Books.

Turns out that *The New Mirror for Travelers* is absolutely hilarious. Paulding writes with a very witty humor which still lands well after almost two centuries of collecting dust. He devotes a small chapter, pages 143 through 154, on "Kaatskill" (his name for both the community and mountains) and the astounding accommodations available at the newly-built Mountain House. Even as he admits his awe at the Mountain House itself one can detect a reserved disdain for the tourism craze which precipitated the Mountain House's construction. He opens his chapter on Kaatskill thus: "Those who are fond of climbing mountains in a hot day, and looking down til their heads turn, must land at the village of Kaatskill, whence they can procure a conveyance to the hotel at Pine Orchard, three thousand feet above the level of the river, and have the pleasure of sleeping under blankets in the dog days."

Paulding, making mocking commentary on the very real necessity of woolen blankets even in August up in the mountains, further describes the almost grotesque effect the mountain climate has on the appetites of visitors: "It is amazing what a glorious propensity to eating is generated by the keen air of these respectable protuberances. People have been know to eat up everything in the house at a meal, and report says that a fat waiter once disappeared in a very mysterious manner." This of course is to say that dinner guests at the Mountain House, having eaten everything else, ate their waiter as well. Paulding also has a lot of gall to refer to the Catskills as "Respectable Protuberances" though I admire him for it.

The rest of Paulding's chapter on Kaatskill is a fascinating bit of social commentary filled with remarks on the old Dutch families of the region, the social upheavals brought by a changing economy, and the collision of new fashions and old customs. He of course conveys all of this in an almost exclusively humorous tone, at one point noting how a young man from the region, "a genuine descendant of Rip Van Winkle," was out hunting and encountered a strange beast "that looked for all the world 'like he didn't know what'" which turned out to be a young woman he knew wearing a new fashionable bonnet.

Those of you who are curious to read James Kirke Pauling's book may find a PDF through this link: [https://www.google.com/books/edition/The New Mirror for Travellers and Guide/bUYfAAAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1](https://www.google.com/books/edition/The-New-Mirror-for-Travellers-and-Guide/bUYfAAAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1)

If you end up spending any time with the book, consider his use of place names in the chapter "Kaatskill" as well as his discussions of infrastructure, his tone and portrayal of different groups of people, comments on fashion and social customs, and his perception of the relationship of this region to the larger world. Perhaps also take his advice on your next visit to Greene County's "Respectable Protuberances" and pack extra food in your picnic basket (or bring spare friends).

John B. Dumond's Runaway Notice
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

This week I wanted to feature an interesting document which testifies to the history and legacy of slavery in Greene County. The document is from the Charles Anderson Collection and has been in the care of the Greene County Historical Society since 1966. A transcription of the document follows here:

Taken up in the woods near Catskill the 22nd October 1780 a Negro man named Peter, supposed to be run away from his master, he speaks nothing but English and his Mother Tongue, the former he speaks so improper that he cannot be understood only here and there a word and the latter is such a tongue that our Negros here cannot understand. ~~We understand by him (or at least we think so) that he has lived with one Rineheart and that he was going to sell him on which the Negro run off, but where Rineheart lives we can not learn.~~ He is about six feet high and about 26 years old, spare and ragged. Whoever proves [illegible] Negro to be their property and paying charges may have him again of the subscriber at his house in the District of the Great Imbought in the County of Albany and State of New York —

October 25, 1780

John B. Dumond

This document is fascinating for myriad reasons, but chief among them is the anecdotal clue revealed about the status of the slave trade in New York at the time this notice was written. Specifically, the commentary on linguistic barriers is surprising because of its implications concerning the origin of people enslaved in the upper Hudson Valley during the late 18th century. John Baptiste Dumond himself was a landowner in Catskill who owned four people in the United States Census of 1800. Whether this was similar to the number of enslaved people in his household in 1780 is unknown, and unfortunately the Federal Census of 1790 offers no insight because the margin which tallied his slaves and those of his neighbors was destroyed.

The number of enslaved people in Dumond's household aside, it is interesting that they apparently possessed a common second language other than English or the still commonly spoken Dutch of this area. For that to have been the case these people couldn't have been separated by more than a generation or two from people who were purchased through transatlantic or Caribbean slave markets. The isolating nature of enslavement in New York, where blacks were frequently the sole or one of only two or three enslaved people in a household, meant there was no broader community to help perpetuate cultural traditions and language. This, and the tendency of enslavers to separate children for sale at a young age, meant there were also few opportunities to pass on generational cultural identities once the enslaved arrived in the upper Hudson Valley.

That the runaway man in this notice was from a different language group and not fluent in English, Dutch, or the common language of Dumond's enslaved is a possible clue that he was a survivor of the middle passage, stolen from his home and brought to a

market in New York which even in the late 18th century was bolstered by an ongoing demand for imported slaves. Whether the runaway man Peter or Dumond's enslaved people spoke Spanish, Portuguese, or different African languages may never be known, but the meeting of these people in this circumstance illustrates broadly the strange cultural collisions precipitated by chattel slavery.

Unrelated to the purpose of the notice is John Dumond's closure with "State of New York" in the year 1780, one year prior to the conclusion of the Siege of Yorktown and three years prior to the signing of the Treaty of Paris. Whether this can be taken as evidence of Dumond's patriot leanings is unknown, but the fact that he would bother to note "State" of New York on a notice such as this (unrelated to functions of the Revolutionary State Government) is perhaps illustrative of the transforming sociopolitical identity of the people in the Town of Catskill at that time.

Questions about anything in this feature can be directed to Jon by email at archivist@gchistory.org

Ice Yachts at Athens

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

Much of my free time the past three weeks has been spent down on the frozen Hudson with the members of the Hudson River Ice Yacht Club. Beginning on January 21 the club began the process of launching their ice boats at Athens on Murderer's Creek, and by Sunday the 23rd several beautiful 19th century ice yachts were fully rigged on the ice waiting for optimal conditions. A layer of snow on the ice hampered sailing for most of that week excepting Thursday the 27th when a wind came strong enough to overcome drag caused by the patchy snow cover. The weekend of the 29th and 30th saw the river swarmed with onlookers who arrived at Athens from up and down the Valley eager to join in the celebratory atmosphere. The snow cover remained an issue, but this week a close eye was kept on the weather with the assumption that the rain forecast for the end of this week would melt the snow cover and add a fresh layer of ice for a weekend of perfect sailing. Several of the boats got a few turns in, but degrading and varied ice conditions, coupled with a forecast of thawing temperatures, led the Club to close the season at Athens with all the yachts hauled out by Sunday, February 13th.

Ice boats are a centuries-old form of transportation. The dutch employed ice boats in the Netherlands for centuries as a practical necessity, using vessels that were essentially sail boats with runners fixed to the hulls for the transportation of people and cargo. These naturally evolved into pleasure craft, but the speed-oriented modern sport still practiced today traces its origins to the early 19th century right here in the Hudson Valley. The triangular "stern-steerers" which made the sport famous during that era were the product of competitive refinements by individual yachtsmen and clubs throughout the Hudson Valley; culminating in a basic hull design which generally sported a gaff-rigged, sprit-rigged, or lateen sail plan based on the desires of the owner. These vessels were capable of speeds in excess of 75 miles per hour in ideal conditions, though there are claims that a few vessels could and did top 100 miles per hour. Regardless of these record-setting claims, ice yachts on the Hudson River were for a brief time the fastest conveyances on the planet.

The oldest boat assembled at Athens for this season is the MARYELLEN, formerly WILDCAT, said to have been constructed in 1865. The design of her hull is similar to a plan illustrated in an 1881 edition of Scribner's Magazine, and sports a relatively commodious cockpit with side rails lending additional structure to the keel. MARYELLEN is nearly identical in design to an ice yacht originally from Athens named SAPPHO which is in possession of a club member but in unrestored condition. SAPPHO was probably built and owned by Addison E. Whiting, a local businessman who was later a resident of New York City. While Athens was never the authoritative epicenter of ice yacht construction or innovation the sport still has venerable old roots here dating back to the 1810s; some of the fastest yachts of the Poughkeepsie and New Hamburg clubs were built or based on designs pioneered upriver.

One of the most widely circulated triumphs of Athenian ice-boaters was the 1821 voyage of Captains Peter G. Coffin and John Burtis from Athens to Albany on a yacht they had recently constructed — by one account the trip was made in only an hour and thirty minutes and the vessel carried an absurd ten passengers (many ice boats today are designed for one or two riders). These two captains, otherwise occupied in the summer piloting sloops in the merchant trade, were representative of what would become a class of sportsmen of moderate to considerable means who occupied their winters with this death-defying leisure pursuit. VIXEN, a lateen-rigged ice yacht also present at Athens this season, was most famously the possession of John A. Roosevelt, uncle to future president Franklin D. Roosevelt (himself also an ice-yachtsman).

With all this history zipping about on the ice it is small wonder I was down there so much, but really... what self-respecting Athenian wouldn't want to go out and celebrate the season in traditional fashion?

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

The Last Trace of Loonenburg By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

For nearly a century prior to the incorporation of Greene County the neighborhood in the vicinity of the Village of Athens was a farming district called Loonenburg. The place was named to commemorate the Van Loons - proprietors of the so-called Loonenburg Patent and one of the eminent landowning families along the west shore of the Hudson River. Loonenburg endured as a primarily agrarian community in which scattered freeholders and tenants drew their wealth from speculation and cultivation of land. The river landing at Loonenburg, complete with an informal ferry operation to connect people with Claverack across the Hudson, endured more or less unchanged until the close of the Revolution. A postwar influx of Yankee migrants from New England bringing new business practices and ready cash touched off a renewed phase of land speculation stretching westward from the Hudson into the Mohawk and Upper Susquehanna, and Loonenburg was caught in the crosshairs of this transformative wave.

Loonenburg, Reed's Landing, and Catskill Landing grew drastically between 1790 and 1810. New surveys slapped municipal street plans over what had recently been farmland and the old landings were improved and expanded into extensive wharves with storehouses and shops. Most importantly, these new boom towns were turned into the termini of an extensive web of turnpikes cut westward into the wilderness upon which settlers passed in droves seeking newly opened lands in the Catskills and beyond. Catskill became the gateway of the Susquehanna Turnpike on the west shore of the Hudson by an act of incorporation in 1800. Likewise, Loonenburg became the terminus in 1802 for a road leading to Cherry Valley called the Schoharie Turnpike. Three years after the turnpike was incorporated the community at Loonenburg was incorporated as the first Village in Greene County and named Athens in commemoration of the classical City.

At Athens virtually all traces of Loonenburg were eradicated within the first decades of the 19th century. Many of the old Dutch homes were replaced by new showcase structures on the village grid, farmland was turned into housing lots, and new industries formed to support the needs of a developing backcountry. Loonenburg was more or less relegated to the dustbin of history - a curious preface to the annals of the Village of Athens - except at the far reaches of the Schoharie Turnpike.

The incorporated names of turnpikes don't necessarily correspond with their popular names. This is a natural byproduct of their obvious purpose: facilitating movement from Point A to Point B and vice versa. It is for this reason that the Susquehanna Turnpike was and still is called the Catskill Road or Catskill Turnpike at its western reaches - for those in Wattles Ferry the road didn't go to the Susquehanna (they were already there), it went to Catskill. Never mind what the articles of incorporation called the turnpike road. Likewise, the Schoharie Turnpike was the Loonenburg Turnpike in the popular parlance of those at its western reaches, and for this reason the original name of Athens officially endures in at least one place just off Route 10 down the road from

Sharon Springs. There, tucked away among old farms and stately edifices like the William Beekman Mansion is a sign for the “Loonenbergh Turnpike,” a town road, complete with a state roadside marker describing the history of this once-important early highway.

Questions and comments, including why on earth the Greene County Historian was meddling in Schoharie County, can be directed to Jon at archivist@gchsitory.org

Historic Preservation is Economic Development By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

About a year ago now was my last “refrigerator-worthy” article, which I know many of you diligently clipped out and hung on your Frigidaires, Kelvinators, and sundry other ice boxes for handy future reference. We were about due for another, and I know I can’t keep writing these just about graveyards, old maps, and the Hudson-Athens Lighthouse no matter how much I love it. Anyhow, get your scissors ready and repeat this after me: HISTORIC PRESERVATION IS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. Spray paint this on your cars, get it tattooed on your foreheads if you need to, but please don’t forget it.

There are many readers of this column who, like me, don’t think they need a detailed explanation of why it is bad to knock down historic buildings. The obvious reality of such decisions is that untold damage is done to the cultural and historic integrity of communities where these buildings disappear; perhaps more alarming and less considered is that the decision to *not* preserve also affects a community’s bottom line. Money talks, as they say, and where one might see an old building as a money pit the reality of it is that strategic maintenance not only creates a unique and highly marketable piece of real estate, but preserves the appeal of the community as a unique place of business and a destination for tourists. To put it simply: by keeping historic buildings you protect your tax base. To put it more simply: historic buildings ensure funding for your fire department, ambulance, police, and public works departments.

In a place like Greene County, where tourism has been a vital component of our economy for quite literally two centuries, our historic buildings are part of what makes us a unique and appealing destination. Anyone can build a tin prefab and bulldoze an old house, but half of America has already fallen victim to this short-sighted “strip mall thinking” in which highways convey us through town after town filled with the same reprehensible McMansion developments, chain stores, and fast food franchises. Is it convenient? Yes. Does it make one strip-mall town more appealing to stop at over another? Absolutely not. Not being appealing is bad for tourism. Not being a tourism destination is bad for tax revenue. You see what I am getting at.

Now I know the impression most people have of historic preservation is that it involves young couples with trust funds fleeing a metropolitan area to buy a half-collapsed and haunted mansion into which they throw millions of dollars in renovations and fabulous antiques. I’ve certainly met people who have gone about historic preservation in that way, and hey if you’ve got the money that’s great. I’ve also found those folks often become full-time and invest in being a part of their new communities in more ways than just increasing the tax appraisal on their homes. If this is one version of historic preservation, you don’t need to look far for alternative examples.

I’m writing this article at a favorite coffee shop of mine just up the road from the Thompson House Resort in Windham. The resort is closed right now, but not dead by any stretch of the imagination. Contractors are scurrying like ants over every inch of

each building on the extensive campus; repairing roofs, siding, and making updates to a resort that has been an institution in Windham since the 1880s. The Thompson House is the benefactor of two forms of historic preservation. The first and most obvious is the work being done by the new owner, Wylder Resorts, which is a monumental effort by a company that specializes in resorts at unique and classic destinations around the United States (yes, Greene County makes that cut!). Equally important is the unsung but heroic preservation effort undertaken by the last owners, the Thompson/Goettsche family, who for generations maintained and expanded the campus as time and finances allowed all while fixing leaks, updating older rooms, and cultivating an atmosphere as a family resort which became so iconic that it caught John Margolies' eye when he was photographing America in the 1970s. The Goettsche family's preservation efforts were thankless - maintaining buildings instead of letting them fall into disrepair, keeping structures rather than replacing them with newer ones, and most importantly finding a buyer who appreciated the property and buildings as much as their family had for over a century.

If the efforts of the Thompsons and a nationwide resort company aren't enough to convince you that "folks in the know" understand historic preservation is economic development, just ask the bank. Two weeks ago I found myself in the basement of the Tanners Bank building on Main Street in Catskill with a small cadre of history buffs. The building was recently purchased by the Bank of Greene County from Trustco and will become part of BOGC's suite of historic office buildings which already dot Main Street. This was exciting news because BOGC already has a reputable track record as preservationists dating back to the 1990s — saving such buildings as the remarkable art deco Cooperative Mutual Insurance Building nearby the Greene County Courthouse.

As we all stood in a basement vault looking at minutes books of the Tanners Bank dating back to 1831, Bank of Greene County President Don Gibson talked excitedly of bringing the interiors of the building back to their original appearance and filling the offices with employees. While the building updates will certainly make the Tanners Bank beautiful, the effort to get the building open again also illustrates a more important benefit - guaranteed traffic by those employees on Main Street and more money spent at lunch meetings, in coffee shops, and by bank patrons who come there to conduct business. It is fitting that the Tanners Bank, once the headquarters of the largest commercial bank in Greene County, should play a role now in helping preserve Main Street.

If you are like me then your money tree hasn't started growing Benjamins on its branches yet, but that doesn't mean historic preservation isn't within your grasp. While all the folks I've talked about here are certainly exemplary of the best Historic Preservation has to offer, being a preservationist takes many forms. Most often it takes the form of fixing a leak in the roof one year, and maybe a coat of paint on a weathered side of the house the next year. Historic Preservation is an effort which can be made in big and small steps with equal success, and the end result is a unique building that

contributes to making your community an unusual and special place to be. Historic preservation is economic development.

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

Moore's Bridge - Why is it called that? Part I
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

The winding bends and turns of State Route 23A deep in Kaaterskill Clove are the latest iteration of a path long held to be the gateway to some of the grandest and wildest scenery of the Catskill Mountains. Seemingly every overlook, falls, and ravine has been granted a name and conferred a role in the sublime pageant which first attracted the painters and writers who fixed the Clove's scenery forever in the American psyche. Even today an annual onslaught of tourists confirms the enduring significance of Kaaterskill Clove as a treasured piece of our nation's first great vacationland. Observed at highway speeds through the windows of a car the particular charms of the Clove are often lost on passing motorists, but even then a taste of its flavor still passes through tempered glass while cars wind their way up and down the Rip Van Winkle Trail.

The heart of the Clove is almost undoubtedly Fawn's Leap, a place immortalized with a roadside history marker to ensure even the most hasty passerby is made privy to the fact that the spot is important enough to possess a name (regardless of whether they might ever hear the associated legend). Such is not the case with countless other locales in the Clove; chief among them being Moore's Bridge, which is the second crossing of Kaaterskill Creek and one of the few enduring place names in Kaaterskill Clove bestowed on a manmade structure. "Moore's Bridge" has been the generally accepted name of the second crossing since at least the end of the 19th century, but unlike so many other locales in the Clove, Moore's Bridge seems to trace its name not to the tourism nomenclature fad which swept the Mountains after the Civil War, but to some other more obscure epoch in the Clove's history.

Harper's Monthly Magazine of July 1854 opened with an article titled "The Catskills" by T. Addison Richards. The article was essentially a tour of the already celebrated environs of the Catskill Mountain House and offered readers the chance to experience a walk and ride around South Mountain and Kaaterskill Clove courtesy of Richards' delightful prose. In describing the Clove, Richards laments that the "total absence of a nomenclature prevents any successful attempt to individualize the many fine points here..." Inadvertently illustrating his point, some well-known locales are immortalized in accompanying engravings bearing unfamiliar names: Church's Ledge and Profile Rock are "High Rocks"; Fawn's Leap is "The Dog Hole"; Haines Falls bears the name "Lower Falls" to distinguish it from the "High Falls" of Peter Schutt which we now know solely as Kaaterskill Falls. Likewise, Benson J. Lossing includes an engraving clearly showing Moore's Bridge in his 1860 book *The Hudson; from the Wilderness to the Sea* but styles it a "rustic bridge" in descriptions that follow the included plate titled "Scene on the Katers-Kill near Palenville." It would take another twenty-five years for T. Addison Richards' nomenclature problem to be definitively resolved.

Following the Civil War a wave of tourists inundated the Catskills, ushering in a golden age which saw the rise of some of the greatest resorts and boarding houses across the

Northern Catskills. Walton Van Loan, a storekeeper and bookseller living in Catskill (and related to the Beach family of the Catskill Mountain House through his wife) decided a quality guide to the mountains, heretofore nonexistent, was exactly the answer to the needs of both tourists and hoteliers alike.

His first guide book, issued in 1876, was loaded with quality business advertisements interspersed with engravings of scenery and descriptions of the most popular walks and rides the Northern Catskills had to offer. As such, Van Loan's guide serves to this day as a veritable gazetteer identifying with charming and memorable names the exact locations Richards wrote about for Harpers back in 1854. An accompanying map insert removes any ambiguity concerning what place names apply to distinct geographic features - more or less solving the "nomenclature problem" definitively.

It seems the only location not identified in Van Loan's guide was Moore's Bridge itself. This is odd, because Van Loan's guide books conferred or confirmed the names of dozens of sites across the Clove and South Mountain - almost all of which are still in use today. Either Moore's Bridge was a name already in use but not "romantic" enough to merit inclusion in a guide to the hidden wilds of the Catskills, or it simply hadn't come into use yet.

More on the origin of the name of Moore's Bridge next week. Questions can be directed in the meantime to Jon at archivist@gchistory.org

Donation of “Teatoring on the Edge” Photography Archives
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

Before consumer drones took away some of the novelty and uniqueness of a well-composed aerial photograph folks in Greene County had to rely on a Piper Cub sputtering overhead to capture that signature birds-eye view. At the controls of that Piper Cub was Clem Hoovler, proprietor of the Freehold Airport, and behind a camera leaning out the passenger door was his daughter Debra Teator - “Teatoring on the edge” (as her business was called) in order to capture a quality scene for her clients. Clem and Deb’s collective efforts are now available for the public to examine at the Greene County Historical Society’s Vedder Research Library thanks to Deb’s recent donation of her archives.

Deb began working with her father to take residential aerals starting in 1976 - serving real estate clients, property owners who wanted a unique decoration, and businesses desiring a special view of their campus. The planning process to provide a client with the ideal shot was an arduous one. It involved not only watching the weather, but figuring out based on the location where the sun needed to be in the sky to get the best lighting. Depending on the location a Piper Cub or Cessna 172 would be the aircraft of choice, and when all conditions were accounted for Deb still had to lean out the window with a 35mm camera hoping that the slipstream and motions of the plane wouldn’t hinder taking a sharp and well-focused exposure. Proof of success appeared in the dark room after the plane was tucked away in its hangar, and forty years later these efforts have culminated in a fascinating and extensive photographic archive.

This collection is unique among the photographic materials available at the Greene County Historical Society for a number of reasons. First and foremost is that it is rare for us to accept an image archive directly from the photographer, meaning that the collection is as near-complete as possible and painstakingly organized by the person who created it all. Secondly, there were never that many aerial photographers based in Greene County during the relatively short period when such work wasn’t being done with drones. Equipment overheads (you need a plane after all) meant many aerals were undertaken by specialty vendors covering a large region. That it just so happened there was a pilot who owned an airport in Freehold with a daughter who was a professional photographer is almost too good to be true.

Deb never set out to be the creator of a historic photographic archive, but you can’t really help it in her line of work. She and her father flew over Woodstock ’94, took pictures of the newly constructed map of Ireland at East Durham in 2001, and even snapped some pics of a small gathering of motorcycles on a field at Blackthorne which would become the annual Catskill Mountain Thunder Motorcycle Rally. It took Deb roughly sixty hours of locating, sorting, and identifying to compile and inventory the roughly ten binders worth of material, but the end result is a useful and well-organized collection of her work - we’ve already had one image request from the collection for an upcoming article on the Irish Alps.

Not to be outdone, Deb's husband Don Teator (our friendly neighborhood Greenville Town Historian) has put together a fantastic 1800-word article concerning this photographic collection. It is chock-full of fascinating tidbits about Clem Hoovler and the Freehold Airport as well as about Deb and the extent and nature of her photographic pursuits. Because of the article's length I couldn't send it all out for the papers in one shot, so you all will have to settle temporarily for the abridged version I parroted to you all here. Don's full article will be making an appearance on the Vedder Research Library blog in the near future festooned with interesting images to match his quality commentary.

In the meantime sincere thanks must be extended to Deb Teator for her efforts to prepare these materials for use by researchers and the public. Those interested in viewing her collection should feel free to book an appointment at the Vedder Library by visiting our website vedderresearchlibrary.org/book-a-visit

Questions can be directed to Jon by email at archivist@gchistory.org

Moore's Bridge - Why is it called that? Part II
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

(This is part two of an article which initially appeared the week of April 3, 2021)

So who exactly is the “Moore” of Moore’s Bridge? Raymond Beecher, writing in *Kaaterskill Clove: Where Nature Met Art*,” proposes that the significant Moore is none other than Charles Herbert Moore, the celebrated Pre-Raphaelite painter who called Catskill his home from 1861 through 1871. This would be a perfectly satisfactory explanation were Moore’s bridge to have been conferred its name during the period when the rest of the clove’s scenery was in the 1870s, but this is not the case. The first published use of the name actually doesn’t even seem to occur until December 30, 1887 when the Hunter newspaper *Hunter Phoenix* wrote a notice picked up by the *Catskill Recorder* reading:

“... Last Saturday a vast mass of rock broke loose from the cliff at the Moore bridge in the Kaaterskill Clove. It weighed many tons and did considerable damage to one of the abutments of the bridge.”

Charles H. Moore first came to the Catskills around 1859 and exhibited a mountain landscape from that visit in 1860 at the National Academy of Design. The painting was well received, but this piece from 1860 and the subsequent works he composed while making his home in Catskill for the next decade relate little to the environs of Kaaterskill Clove. Many contemporaries of Moore, notably John Frederick Kensett, were well established and exhibiting works of Kaaterskill Clove well before Moore had produced his debut Catskill Mountain scene. This of course begs the question why the second bridge in the Clove would be named for an artist who has little association with its immediate vicinity. The fact that Walton Van Loan’s guide book of 1875 doesn’t care to connect Charles Herbert Moore with the bridge would seem to confirm that the possibility is slim.

A map held by Greene County Real Property Tax Services dating to 1848 offers a far more plausible alternative for the eponymous Moore. The map in question was prepared by John Van Vechten to illustrate the subdivision of lots one and two of Great Lot Twenty Six of the Hardenbergh Patent. Notably, at the second crossing of Kaaterskill Creek a marking is made showing “Alexander T. Moore’s” lands and his saw mill smack in the heart of the clove within a stone’s throw of Fawn’s Leap. Downstream at Palenville appears the tannery of Gilbert and Jonathan Palen.

All of this industry called the clove home at the same time Thomas Cole and his contemporaries were conveying scenes of Kaaterskill Clove’s allegedly untrammelled beauty to a public eager to witness America’s romantic wilderness. In that era the clove embodied perfectly the broad competition between industry and art - one vying to draw material wealth from its resources, the other convinced that the natural beauty of the place itself was a component of our identity and therefore something worth preserving.

Alexander T. More, correctly spelled with only one “o,” was himself a son of the mountains. Born to Scottish immigrants in Harpersfield before the Revolution, his father John had taken the family to Catskill Landing when Harpersfield was evacuated in 1778. Many of Alexander’s siblings were born at Catskill and John More had himself served in the militia there. A letter from 1834 which John More sent to his friend and fellow veteran Barent DuBois summarized much of the circumstances of the life of the More family and John More’s service in that time. Returning to Delaware County following the Peace, the More family (which was even at that time quite prolific) settled around Grand Gorge, hence the vicinity’s original name of “Moresville.”

Alexander More’s saw mill in the clove was a relatively short lived venture akin to many of the forest industry operations of that period. Rapidly depleted forests, spring floods, and a turbulent economy made mountain mills a tough prospect, and all trace of the mill was probably gone by the Civil War. The only thing that apparently stuck was the name, and what one generation knew as the “bridge at More’s saw mill” was shortened to the “Moore’s Bridge” of another generation. A photograph from around 1895 shows one of many iterations of the king post bridge at that site with the words “Moors [sic] Bridge” painted in white along one of the trusses. We’re still calling it that today, broadly unaware that the name is one of the last traces of the early industry that competed to draw wealth from the clove by harvesting rather than simply observing its natural resources.

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

Jim Planck Uncovers Catskill's Activist Barber
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian.

In the most recent edition of the Greene County Historical Society's quarterly journal "Greene County History" Society Vice President Jim Planck relates part of the story of Robert Jackson and Martin Cross, two Black men engaged in the Barber's trade at Catskill from the 1820s through the 1850s. Mr. Planck's article is fascinating for several reasons, including the resources he used to develop this story. Martin Cross and Robert Jackson were participants in some of the earliest activism undertaken by Greene County's newly emancipated African-American community in the 1830s, and much of their story has been recovered through examination of the online archives of William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist newspaper "The Liberator" which was published in Boston from 1831 through 1865. The Liberator was a paper of national significance and endures today as one of the preeminent primary sources testifying not only to the fraught social and political climate of antebellum America, but to divisiveness within the abolition movement itself prior to the Civil War.

I won't dwell at length on the story in Mr. Planck's article, which relates the circumstances of the galvanization of Catskill's Black community in the early 1830s, but I would like to spend some time contextualizing it. Prior to the publication of his story I was broadly unaware of the political activism of Black Catskillians before the Civil War. I incorrectly assumed that the clearest manifestation of their new political and social identity was in the organization of African-American church congregations which served both here and throughout America as venues for spiritual, educational, and social advancement.

It turns out that Black members of the community in Catskill were far more involved, outspoken, and politically active than any written account until now has grasped. Men like Martin Cross held influential social positions in the community - his barber shop was quite literally opposite the bank at the center of town and catered to all members of the community. Cross, Robert Jackson, and other Black Catskillians were organizing political meetings and publishing resolutions in the newspaper as responses to community debates and lectures on Abolition which refused to recognize their collective voice. A school for "colored students" was even organized and funded in 1832, catering to over thirty students who weren't permitted to attend any other schools in town.

This sort of activism and agency in self-determination were occurring at a time when many free Blacks in New York were denied even the right to vote, and all of this flew in the face of attempts by white stakeholders to infantilize the Black community as a monolithic body beholden to external aid and otherwise incapable of uplifting themselves. What Mr. Planck's article accomplishes, aside from shedding light on overlooked sources, is to remind us of the voice and vitality of this otherwise marginalized local community.

Martin Cross would go on to at least one more remarkable achievement outside of the events described in Mr. Planck's Article. Whether he was involved in the Colored Temperance Rally held at Catskill in July of 1844 is unknown (the event allegedly attracted almost 3,000 Black reformists to his adopted hometown), but he was a delegate to the Colored Men's Convention at Troy in 1855 as one of three representatives from Greene County. Frederick Douglass was also an attendee, and Cross was appointed to a business committee of seven alongside Douglass for the express purpose of outlining rules of the convention and principles for a platform.

The Convention was called with the goal of organizing a political party whose objectives included restoration of the franchise to Black voters without a property requirement. Since 1821 only free Blacks with property valued over a certain amount had been allowed to vote in State elections, effectively barring Black New Yorkers from political activism. In the words of one attendee: "By securing our political rights, we shall secure also civil rights, which go hand in hand." The convention only lasted a few days, but served to send a message broadly that Black New Yorkers were organized, motivated, and well-equipped to forge their own avenue into State politics.

Martin Cross continued in the Barber's profession in Catskill at least through the Civil War, his son Martin Jr. joining him in the business before enlisting in the 54th Massachusetts Infantry and serving with distinction during the Civil War. Martin Sr. seems to have passed away following the war, and even his grave in the Village Cemetery is now lost to time. Fortunately and remarkably, his work and deeds left a considerable paper trail to illustrate broadly what the substance of his life was in Catskill during the antebellum period. Through continued examination of these sources it is hoped that we will be able to revise, reexamine, and add previously omitted voices to our interpretation of this critical period in local and national history.

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

I've Got Office Hours Now!

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

No new exciting history updates this week. Instead I wanted to give everyone a heads up that thanks to the Greene County Tourism department I will be offering public office hours once a month at Catskill Point. You can find me at the Freight Master building from 5:30 to 7:30 on May 11, June 8, July 6, August 10, and September 7. If folks show up and make use of my time I hope to make alternate arrangements to hold expanded Winter office hours also at various locations. To summarize everything I've said so far: I'll be hanging out in a cool old building by the river once a month - you should come visit.

I'm offering evening hours for those of you who might be at work during the day and to catch folks who already enjoy using the facilities at Catskill Point and Dutchman's Landing on pleasant Summer evenings. Anyone is welcome to drop by and ask questions, talk history, or even just see the building and small museum housed within.

The freight master building (along with its adjoining warehouse) is part of one of the most intact historic steamboat landings on the Hudson River. The passenger terminal, which many of you will remember as a fuel dock and oil terminal, is still standing as private property to the north of the freight master building. Likewise, the slip for the Catskill-Greendale Ferry sits between the two fenced off and in disuse. At one time Catskill Point was the gateway to the hundreds of resorts and boarding houses that dotted the northern Catskills, and many old-timers around town still fondly recall walking or driving to the point on a weekend to watch the day line steamers arrive packed with crowds of summer visitors.

The point is a little more quiet these days, but Greene County Tourism manages the property as a very successful and affordable events venue. Many of you will no doubt be in attendance for this year's Rip Van Winkle Wine and Beverage Festival on May 7th, and during the Fall the dock at Catskill Point hosts tour ships carrying leaf peepers up the Hudson on weekly fall foliage cruises. Its a happening place, and I hope a few of you readers might take the time to come down and spend some time "talking shop" with me on an otherwise quiet weeknight.

Hope to see you there! Questions and comments can be directed to Jon at archivist@gchistory.org

Not-So-Final Resting Place By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

Elias and William Reynolds didn't like the family plot. Their father Samuel, the son of a tanner in Windham, had passed away in 1871. He was followed by their mother in 1887, and in 1892 the boys figured it was high time to spruce things up a bit in their corner of the Windham Cemetery. Being well-to-do sons of the mountains with money to burn, William and Elias went in search of a stonecutter capable of creating and delivering an elegant and lasting family monument to their parent's burial plot. Mr. William Fox and his brother Peter turned out to be the men for the job. Proprietors of the North River Steam Granite and Marble Works in Coxsackie, the Fox brothers facility catered to clients seeking new fashionable granite monuments for their graves - a departure from the softer but elegant marble stones that had been in vogue (and more affordable) for most of the 19th century.

William Reynolds' bill, itemized with an accompanying letter from the Fox bros. arranging delivery of the monument, came to a whopping \$400.00 dollars when everything was settled in 1893. That amount had the equivalent buying power of roughly \$12,000.00 in 2022. The kingly sum paid for a large central monument made of "best black Quincy granite" and the Reynolds brothers gave the company their parents' old gravestones in exchange for three small plot markers to match the new monument. Up the mountain went the new Reynolds family monument and back down the mountain to Coxsackie came their old gravestones. Rather than putting them to waste, it is possible the old Reynolds gravestones were cut down and reused or otherwise broken up and repurposed.

Such was not the case with the old gravestones of several other clients of the Steam Granite and Marble Works. At their former property on South River Street in Coxsackie nothing remains of the Fox brothers facility save the remnants and castoffs of the raw material that was processed there for decades. Chunks and huge sections of granite and marble litter the ground and fill the soil. Interspersed among the rubble appears a variety of partially completed and fully finished gravestones of all sorts - some perhaps mistakes, others completed but unpaid for, and some are stones like those of the Reynolds family - removed and replaced by descendants sensitive to changes in style and taste.

The grave of Caroline Stevens is perhaps the most stirring of all the detritus visible to passerby. The daughter of storekeeper Jason Stevens and wife Rebecca Stevens of Cairo, she passed at the age of three and was buried in the Cairo Cemetery in 1860. At some point a descendant in the 20th century (possibly one of Caroline's two surviving brothers) commissioned a large granite tablet to honor two generations of the Stevens family, and Caroline's beautiful marble gravestone was replaced when her name was enshrined on the new family marker alongside the rest of her family. Caroline's old stone found its way back to the Granite Works, and there it has sat ever since with no purpose to serve other than arouse questions. Unlike the Reynolds family, no record of

this transaction by the Stevens family survives save the simple evidence of a new gravestone in the Cairo Cemetery and an old one for the same person cast aside in Coxsackie.

Resources for this short article include the papers of William R. Reynolds, part of the Reynolds-Cody Collection at the Vedder Research Library, and the aptly named online database "Find A Grave" which is a useful tool should you ever stumble across a mislaid gravestone. Questions and comments can be directed to Jon at archivist@gchistory.org. Special thanks also goes to Larry Tompkins for patiently wandering around among the ancestors at the Windham Cemetery as I sought to take a picture for this article.

Down by the River
by Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

To start this week's column thanks should first be extended to the seven folks who dropped by the Freightmaster Building at Catskill Point last Wednesday for my first office hours. As the saying goes: "a good time was had by all." I fully anticipated a quiet two hours to work on an article and instead had some fascinating folks drop by to fill the evening with interesting questions, lively discussion, and some curious artifacts which everyone enjoyed examining. My next office hours will be on Wednesday, June 8 from 5:30 to 7:30.

For those of you wondering why my summer office hours are at Catskill Point (as opposed to literally anywhere else in the County) I could of course make a quip about trying to inconvenience those of you on the Mountaintop - but really the answer is that the Point is a fascinating location you should make time to visit if you've never been. The product of over a century of engineering, Catskill Point embodies the history of the County broadly and offers excellent interpretive opportunities - particularly with regards to our maritime heritage. Being down there last week of course called to mind many scattered recollections of river history - in particular the Dodge Brothers of Catskill; two of whom met their untimely deaths in steamboat accidents while employed on the Hudson.

The Dodge brothers, like many young men from the valley towns of Greene County, spent at least part of their working lives on or adjacent to the River. The Hudson at that time was literally the gateway to the world and offered chances to broaden horizons and work with cutting edge technologies. William, Wellington, and Williamson all took positions on steamboats - an exciting but dangerous line of work even under the best circumstances. On board the elegant passenger boat *ALIDA* young Williamson Dodge was crushed to death in an accident in September 1853 at the age of 15; likewise, on board the steam towboat *JOHN BIRKBECK* Wellington Dodge was killed in the machinery at the age of 19.

Williamson and Wellington were buried next to each other under gravestones in the Village Cemetery that their parents commissioned from Catskill stonecutter Israel H. Baldwin. Brief accounts of the circumstances of their deaths are elaborated on each. Such was not the fate of their eldest brother William, who went on to have a long career "teaching pupils" in the boiler rooms of the steamboats *CATSKILL*, *THOMAS POWELL*, and *CITY OF HUDSON* before taking up a landlocked career as chief engineer of a grain elevator at Jersey City. A window into William Dodge's career appears in a fond recollection he wrote to the Catskill Recorder concerning Edward A. Browere, son of the painter A. D. O. Browere of Catskill, who was one of the young men to whom Dodge taught the engineer's trade while working on the river in the 1850s. In the obituary for Mr. Browere, who died in 1895 while employed in Lyons, NY, the surviving Dodge brother mused:

“I heard with pain last night of the death of Edward A. Browere. He was one of my pupils, starting with me in 1859. I thought the first night he was on duty with me, he would turn out good material, and he did. After about three years with me in the steamboats *CATSKILL* and *THOMAS POWELL* I recommended him for an Assistant Engineers position, then to the Catskill Ferry Co., and later to succeed myself as engineer of the *CITY OF HUDSON*. In every place he justified my confidence.”

William Dodge himself lived until 1919, having spent most of his life working on or next to the river before blindness left him homebound in his twilight years. His obituary seems to indicate that even in his last years he retained an audience interested in hearing his “sea stories” - whoever wrote the obituary alluded that the *THOMAS POWELL* (which saw some service as a contract Union Army transport during the Civil War) had the distinction of ferrying Abraham Lincoln on several occasions - insinuating that Dodge could possibly have been in the presence of our heroic 16th President. Likewise related but of less dubious veracity was Dodge’s memory of the Catskill Steam Transportation Company forcing all its vessels to observe the Sabbath - shutting down and anchoring wherever they were on the River at 12:00AM Sunday mornings and not weighing anchor for twenty-four hours. The obituary closed with this passage:

“The passing of this old man marks the closing of an epoch: the great days of river traffic, before electricity’s development set many rival forces at work. The rivermen of the last century were custodians of much interesting and valuable information, for they had known varied lives of usefulness and profit to the public which they served.”

Hope to catch you down by the river next month. Questions and comments can be directed to Jon at archivist@gchistory.org

William Cockburn's Map of the McLean, Treat, and McLean Patent
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

In a recent two-part article for *Porcupine Soup*, Sylvia Hasenkopf shed light on the grim story of the 1780 Strope Massacre in the hamlet of Round Top in the Town of Cairo. The circumstances of this raid by warring Indians and the killing of Johannes Strope and his wife were recorded by regional author and pamphleteer Josiah Priest and sampled heavily by Charles Rockwell in his book *The Catskill Mountains and the Region Around*. Beyond the circumstances of the massacre narrative little today endures to relate the substance and nature of Johannes Strope and his family's life on what was then one of the frontiers of European settlement. A recently cataloged map helps dispel a bit of this obscurity.

William Cockburn was a native of Scotland with an artist's eye and a knack for numbers. He probably emigrated to the Province of New York sometime in the early 1760s, and by the end of that decade was engaged virtually full-time surveying and delineating the vast collage of (often inconveniently overlapping) land patents which for almost a century had slowly crept their way westward from the Hudson to the interiors of the Catskill Mountains and beyond. Season after season, patent after patent, William Cockburn and his kid brother James surveyed and prepared maps which in themselves were objects of beauty and precision. However, in practical application the lines of their surveys wove a web which first expelled the land's original inhabitants and subsequently ensnared generations of tenants on behalf of an increasingly land-rich provincial aristocracy.

The work of the Cockburn brothers was the work of colonization - with compass and chain they realized westward expansion rod by rod and blaze by blaze across the lands of countless native tribes in the name of the Province and those who ruled it. Each survey they prepared represented the definitive realization of tracts vaguely described in deeds and letters patent often prepared by proprietors who had never seen nor fully understood the scope of their own lands. The Cockburns were among those charged by the new owners with contextualizing and reporting on those lands in all their detail. In reports and maps William and James Cockburn related where respective lands were, what was on them, what merits existed for improvement, and how such improvement might be accomplished by the Cockburn brothers' respective clients.

This work as vanguards of a new paradigm in land use and land ownership required infrastructure and support - itemized bills for the joint and individual labors of the Cockburns list everything from the total cost of provisions, payment for individual laborers who assisted the surveys, costs for searches at clerk's offices, travel time, and the expenses for drafting reports and maps ultimately destined for the desks of the new lords of the Catskills: the Livingstons, Duanes, Van Rensselaers, Clarkes, and their peerage.

Such was the case with a map prepared by William Cockburn from a survey he completed in July of 1768 for Lieutenant Neil McLean, Doctor Malachi Treat, and

Doctor Donald McLean, all late of his majesty's service (probably in the Seven Years' War). Treat and the McLeans were granted two tracts of land - one a large quadrilateral over the East Kill Valley in modern Jewett, the other an inexplicable shape made to fit against the bounds of the old Catskill Patent in modern Cairo. Cockburn's map lists many anecdotes concerning the prospects of the land: the variety of timber, the prime farmlands, and the context of the land in relation to the river and "Blue Mountains." The homes of several settlers are also shown, and the names of "persons employed in the survey" are interestingly related at the lower left of the map.

The names of Cockburn's assistants are as follows: John Pierce, Johannes Strop, [illegible] Young, William Hume, and John Wigram. Also shown on the map, just outside the bounds of the McLean and Treat lands in Cairo, appears the cabin of Johannes Strope on an upper reach of the Shinglekill; the house being more or less in the vicinity which local tradition bears out as the location of the massacre perpetuated twelve years after the map was produced. Whether the Johannes employed by William Cockburn was the ill-fated father or his eldest son is unclear, but it does illustrate the types of paying labor available to someone settled on the frontier in that time. It also places Strope on one side of the contentious conflict surrounding native expulsion caused by continued European encroachment on Native territory. Strope, as a participant not only in the settlement of the frontier but as a laborer in the surveys to perpetuate westward expansion, was engaged in a high-stakes contest long before the Revolution brought turmoil, and ultimately doom, to his family.

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

George Clarke and the Canajoharie and Catskill Railroad
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

In 1844 George Clarke Jr. of Hyde Hall, Otsego County, filed a lease in the Greene County Clerk's Office for a portion of lot six in the First Division of the Lindesay Patent. The lessee, Mr. James Millard of Catskill, was a lumber dealer in Catskill and got a portion of the lot for a term of twenty years with the first ten of those years leased at \$25.00/annually. Millard was burdened by the terms of the lease to pay Clarke the modern equivalent of about \$1,000 annually while also paying all taxes on the property himself. Additionally, Clark included a requirement that Millard make improvements to the lot - erecting a dock and storehouse from which Millard would conduct his Lumber business. The lease on the whole is typical of the many leases George Clarke and his father filed in the Greene County Clerk's office, but Millard's piece of lot six was unusual, as it had previously been the terminus of the short lived Canajoharie and Catskill Railway.

George Clarke, Jr. of Hyde Hall in Otsego County ended up with land in Catskill because of George Clarke. The landlord of 1844 was the great-great-grandson of Provincial Governor and Jamaican Planter George Clarke, esq. who was himself the son-in-law of Edward Hyde the Provincial Governor of North Carolina and one-time Provost Marshall of Jamaica. Governor Clarke, a power broker in the Province of New York, likely aided and abetted the issuing of Letters Patent to John Lindesay in 1738 for a 490-acre tract of land between the Catskill Creek and the Hudson which later generations would style the "Lindesay Patent" in John Lindesay's honor. It was this patent that would become the east half of the Village of Catskill.

While this patent was neither the largest nor most important piece of land in the real estate portfolios of either Clarke or Lindesay, the land was nonetheless partitioned in two divisions in 1741 among Lindesay, Clarke, and several proprietors for disposition or use as they saw fit. In an age when land wealth had a direct bearing on political power even the smallest tracts of land helped ensure income and possible admission to the Province's political arena. George Clarke had lots of land, and retired comfortably back to his estate in England after his stint as Lieutenant Governor under George Clinton ended in 1747. On his death Clarke's children would inherit sugar plantations in Jamaica and thousands of acres of mountains and valleys in Upstate New York - an inheritance endowed with vast financial and political potential and also primed for turmoil.

The saga of the Clarke family following their return to the United States after the close of the Revolution is one fraught with class tensions written mostly in ledgers and reports that tallied the family's growing revenues and mounting debts following the construction of their new family seat at Hyde Hall overlooking Otsego Lake. An English Country estate built from the spoils of Jamaican slavery and New York tenantry, Hyde Hall endures as an embodiment of the vision of the Clarke family for the young United States in which a landed elite were as permanent fixtures as the stones of the great houses they ruled from.

It was in keeping with this vision that George Clarke and his son George Clarke, Jr. perpetuated the lease system by which James Millard got his lumberyard in 1844. While the terms of the Clarke-Millard lease were not unfavorable, the creation of improvements and the guarantee of an income from this small piece of the Clarke family's large portfolio was assumed to be the key to guaranteeing the family's financial security for generations to come. Indeed, all of the risk (at least on paper) rested on Millard's shoulders. After all, it was he who was burdened with the rent, taxes, and construction fees in an age when financial panics threatened ruin to businessmen such as himself with alarming frequency.

It was just that economic instability that had done in the previous tenant of Millard's lumberyard. In Clarke's lease to Mr. Millard the description details the right of the Canajoharie and Catskill Railway (which was by that time all but defunct) to "use or take away the turn table, well pump, and buildings on said premises." The general location of this site and the circumstances of the Railroad's decline will be detailed next week.

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

George Clarke and the Canajoharie and Catskill Railroad, Part II
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

When the Erie Canal was fully opened to navigation in 1825 the Village of Catskill was left behind. The audacious new canal represented a revolution in commercial shipping; supplanting the wagon once bound for Catskill with the barge bound for Albany. In a few short years what had once been an important hub on several westerly turnpikes was relegated to what many Catskill businessmen saw as the economic dustbin. For these entrepreneurs the good times had ended, and it would only be through equally revolutionary measures that Catskill's relevance in state commerce could be redefined.

It wasn't supposed to have gone down this way. Probably by nature of its size, geography, and a little luck the land which comprised the 490 acres of John Lindesay's Patent had been left sparsely settled until the close of the Revolution. It was in those first years of the new Republic that Lt. Gov. George Clarke's great grandson returned to the United States to take control of his family's North American assets. Throughout the 1790s George Clark, Esq. found ready and willing business with the droves of New Englanders seeking new opportunities on their way west. Upon his and his fellow proprietor's lots in the Lindesay Patent a new village sprang up from nothing. In just over a decade the boom town of Catskill Landing became the terminus of major western turnpikes and the seat of the government of the new County of Greene. This boom lasted until the completion of the Erie Canal transformed the status quo of commercial shipping in New York State, cutting Catskill out of a system in which it had recently been an integral part.

The blow struck by the Erie Canal did not go unanswered. In 1830 the State of New York granted a charter to some Catskill businessmen in order that they might potentially strike a blow in return. The charter was for a railroad designed to redirect Albany-bound freight by making it more timely to offload from the canal at Canajoharie and ship goods by rail to Catskill where sloops would complete the journey to New York. Essentially the plan called for a railroad to restore Catskill's status quo and preserve the shipping infrastructure that had allowed the Village to grow and flourish for thirty years previous. The only hiccup in the plan was the railroad itself — a new, expensive, and largely untested technology that presented the railroad's directors with a slew of logistical challenges.

When construction on the railroad finally got underway in earnest in 1836 the turntable, pumps, and workshops of the railroad were apparently constructed more or less on the grounds that now comprise one of the parking lots along water street used for the Greene County Government building; specifically the lot adjoining Crossroads Brewing Company. The fact that the actual location of this terminus was lost to time is somewhat surprising, considering that the Canajoharie and Catskill Railroad's history and extant documentation have been closely scrutinized for well over 80 years. Outside of George Clarke's lease of land to James Millard for a lumberyard no maps, deeds, or manuscript materials describe the location of the terminus and its contents so precisely.

Millard's lease, located in the Greene County Clerk's office in Deed Book 34, page 17, describes the parcel: "Beginning at the south line of lot no. 6 in the first division of Lindsey's [sic] patent and upon the west side of Water street and running from thence northerly along the west side of said street to the north line of said lot no. 6, thence westerly to the Catskill [creek], thence southerly down and along the same to the south line of said lot no. 6, thence along said line to the place of beginning. Excepting thereupon the right and privilege the Canajoharie and Catskill Rail road to use the said rail road running through the same as long as said rail road is used between Catskill and Potter Hollow. Also excepting the right or privilege of said company to use or take away the turn table, well pump, and buildings upon the said premises at any time during the use of said road as aforesaid without obstruction."

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

George Clarke and the Canajoharie and Catskill Railway, Part III

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

The most interesting thing about James Millard's lease, outside of the description of the privilege of access enjoyed by the Canajoharie and Catskill railroad, is George Clarke's apparent optimism. The George Clarke who leased his land for a lumberyard to Millard in 1844 was the son of George Clarke, Esq. who had returned to the United States from England in the 1790s and built the family seat at Hyde Hall in Otsego County in the 1820s. When Clarke the builder died in 1834 one of the many valuable assets left to his heirs was 100 shares of stock in the Canajoharie and Catskill Railway amounting to \$3,250.00 (a value equivalent to about \$110,000.00 in 2022). It is small wonder that in 1844 Clarke still held hope that the railroad his father held no inconsiderable number of shares in would still pay off somehow, but the possibility proved to be far fetched.

In the time since his father's death the Canajoharie and Catskill Railway had mutated from promising concept into a financial albatross plagued by legislative investigations, subpar equipment, and skyrocketing operating costs which had doomed the railroad to oblivion. The railroad was done and gone for all intents and purposes roughly two years before James Millard decided see if he could repurpose the lot into a lumberyard and dock. Clarke's obvious interest in seeing a return on his investment aside, the failure of the Canajoharie and Catskill Railroad also meant the loss of an opportunity to rapidly increase the value of the other lands his family held in Catskill.

Because Clarke owned the land on which the Railroad had its terminal both before and after the railroad existed, there is a possibility he also leased the land to the railroad during the period it operated (though no extant lease is available to prove the arrangement). The terms of this lease would be interesting to see, as it would indicate whether Clarke viewed the railroad venture itself as an opportunity to make money (i.e. he leased to them for a considerable fee) or as an opportunity to facilitate a business that would help grow the value of his other lands by leasing to them at a lower fee. It may even be possible Clarke accepted shares in their stock as payment, or that he purchased the

stock as a way to earn returns because he had already leased the land to someone else who sub-let the land to the Railroad company. More research is required to discern the facts of this arrangement.

What is clear is the manner in which George Clarke, Esq. rode the transformative wave of Catskill's boom years prior to the opening of the Erie Canal. Many of his leases illustrate a sense for development that one might consider typical on an English manor of the period. From the 1790s through the 1810s Clarke sold land in some cases, but leased land in many other instances to businessmen and people with ready capital often on the term of two lives. This method, by which the lessee and their progeny held the land for their lifetimes, offered subtle benefits for Clarke. The terms often placed the tax burden on the lessee while also requiring the lessee to make certain improvements. For his lands in the Village of Catskill this method helped to drive up the value of unimproved lands Clarke owned adjacent to those he leased while simultaneously relieving any burden of cost for his continued ownership of the leased lot. All of this ensured Clarke an income while also giving the lessee what appears to be relatively favorable terms.

Specifically on Lot 6 in the first division of the Lindesay Patent it seems Clarke not only leased, but renegotiated with the lessees and re-leased lands as the village street plan slowly developed overtop of the old division lines of 1741. The lands around those Clarke leased to James Millard for his lumberyard perfectly exemplify this. Before the village grid had been fully developed Clarke leased all of lot six to Dr. Thomas Thomson and his sons James, Thomas, and John Alexander for the duration of the life of the longest lived among them. As connecting and parallel streets adjoining Main were laid down and lot 6 was transected Clarke apparently came to an arrangement to re-lease unused portions of the lot. In so doing he alluded to the previous Clarke-Thomson lease when he sold lands on the west side of Main Street to hoteliers Elnathan Gaylord and Edwin Croswell and leased a neighboring lot to William Magilton. Clarke likewise described this earlier arrangement when he leased James Millard land along Catskill Creek.

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

New Email List for the Greene County Historian
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

Not too much to offer in the “history articles” department this week, but I would like to start off by saying I hope everyone reading had a pleasant and safe Independence Day weekend! This past week on Wednesday the 29th I offered an impromptu walking tour of the Catskill Village Cemetery, which among other things is the burial place of Uncle Sam’s brother. About thirty attendees got to learn about this and other fascinating facts related to one of Greene County’s coolest graveyards, and it was great to see so many people out after what seems to be almost two years of minimal public programming.

This event was only announced through facebook, so if you are surprised to learn about this history walk then you are not alone. There is no need to fret however, because this was just a trial run to wet my feet again after our recent public health crisis put the kibosh on large lectures and events. In fact, now is your chance to get clued in on when future events are happening by signing up for my new email list. Use this link to find the sign-up page: <https://vedderresearchlibrary.org/historianmailinglist>

I can’t promise this new email list will be consistent or particularly insightful, but I am sure that it will serve as a handy tool to help keep you clued in on when great local history stuff will be happening. For those wondering when I’ll give another tour of Catskill Village Cemetery please stay tuned because I hope to have one more before the year is out.

For those looking for more history stuff coming up you happen to be in luck. The Hudson-Athens Lighthouse kicks off their tour season the weekend of July 9th during the Athens Street Festival. The boat leaves the dock at Athens for the lighthouse at 10:00, 11:30, and 1:00 that day. Tickets as of right now should be available at the dock.

For those who prefer more grounded events and would like to avoid the river there will be a gravestone cleaning workshop offered at the Palenville Cemetery on July 9th from 9-11 in the morning. This free event will be followed up by a history event in the Palenville Cemetery on July 16th during which people can meet some historical figures from Palenville’s past and learn about the rich history of the hamlet. The cemetery is located on Cemetery Road in Palenville and information can be found by contacting Eva Behr at EvaBehr2@gmail.com or by visiting <http://www.palenvilleny.com/>

The Mountain Top Arboretum will be hosting a walk and talk by Director Betsy Jacks of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site on July 9th also! This event celebrates the artist Thomas Cole’s connection to and profound respect for the forests and trees he encountered throughout the Catskills in pursuit of his profession as a landscape painter celebrating the American wilderness. Details can be found by visiting: <https://www.mtarboretum.org/events>

The Mountain Top Historical Society's Annual Meeting is on July 9 starting at 10am. Their upcoming events can be found online here for those who might already be booked up that day: <https://www.mths.org/events.html> (I'm looking forward to their August 14th lecture featuring Dr. Gary Lelonek on his book "The Jewish History of Tannersville, New York" which is a fascinating read.)

The Greene County Historical Society is having a concert at the Bronck Museum titled "Songs of the Sixties" performed by Lex Grey and the Urban Pioneers on Sunday, July 10, and 1:30pm. Details here: <https://mailchi.mp/af7f2d5174dc/gchs-annual-meeting-on-may-8903581?e=8d461ca493>

Lastly, for those of you willing to make a drive, I got wind that Mike Kudish will be having a signing and talk for his latest edition of "The Catskill Forest: A History" In Andes, NY on Tuesday July 12 from 4:30 to 6:30 at Diamond Hollow Books. I have a previous edition of this book and it makes me smarter just being near it. Apparently seating is very limited and details are available here: <https://diamondhollowbooks.com/events>

I hope this fills out your calendar for this coming weekend, and please do sign up for my email list!

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

Catskill's Daguerreotype Dynasty

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

In the spring of 1857 an advertisement appeared in the *Greene County Whig* announcing the opening of a photographic studio on Main Street in Catskill. Located above Van Loan Brothers Book Store, *Van Loan's New Sky Light Daguerreotype Rooms* offered the public the opportunity to have portraits and images commissioned using the most popular and exciting techniques the field of photography had to offer. Van Loan's New Skylight Room was probably not the first formal photographic studio in Catskill, but it arrived here sporting a pedigree that traced its lineage to the genius of the earliest Daguerreotypists active in the United States.

The Daguerreotype process, which was the world's first widely available photographic technique, arrived in the United States almost immediately following frenchman Louis Daguerre's public announcement of the process in 1839. Samuel F. B. Morse, inventor of the telegraph, had visited Daguerre prior to the announcement and discussed this early period of innovation in a letter to Henry Hunt Snelling at Poughkeepsie in 1848. The principle object of Morse's letter was to clarify the timeline concerning those involved with the perfection of the daguerreotype process as a technique for making portraits — an idea that was relatively novel given the constraints initially posed by Daguerre's method.

The Daguerreotype process required lots of light, long exposures, and a sound understanding of chemistry to effect a photograph that was often difficult to see on the exposed silver plate. Starting in 1839 Samuel Morse along with a small cohort in the United States began to study, perfect, and improve on Daguerre's revolutionary but temperamental work. Morse claimed that by 1840 he, as well as Alexander S. Wolcott and John W. Draper, had all successfully attempted portraiture with improvements to Daguerre's method - an achievement with far-reaching repercussions and thus an act of considerable historical significance.

Alexander S. Wolcott and his partner John Johnson subsequently committed wholeheartedly to the advancement of daguerreotype portraiture, jointly developing methods to improve everything from the cameras themselves, to the quality of the photographic plates, and even reimagining the physical spaces in which their subjects were photographed. Wolcott and Johnson's work culminated in a novel studio located on Broadway and Chambers Streets in New York City, where in a room on an upper floor they had subjects sit for portraits beneath a custom-built skylight. Beneath that skylight was a circular track apparatus which allowed the entire system — subject, camera, and backdrop — to be positioned where the ambient light illuminated the sitter most fully and effectively for a timely and well-lit image.

Wolcott and Johnson's innovation, which was well suited to the commercial application of daguerreotype portraiture, proved most lucrative as a licensed product. By 1841 they had sold the rights to use their technique in England to a Mr. Richard Beard, and before July of that same year sold their studio in New York to a businessman from

Catskill named Matthew Dies Van Loan who immediately took to photography with some fanfare. Van Loan's advertisement in the *New York Tribune* for July 1841 announced "PHOTOGRAPHIC LIKENESSES by the Daguerreotype Process. M. D. Van Loan, successor to A. S. Wolcott."

Van Loan apparently experienced favorable initial success, and received glowing editorials in the *Tribune* and the *New-York Herald*. Both papers lauded him as one of the City's eminent practitioners, with the *Herald* even praising his latest innovations in the technique as "Sun Painting." It was during this period that Van Loan likely began training his son Samuel in the process using the skylight arrangement, and it is possible that Matthew brought Samuel with him when he departed for Europe in the late summer of 1842 to study abroad and further improve his work.

What happened next becomes confused. Van Loan returned from Europe and the New York studio operated successfully likely into 1844, but by 1847 Matthew Van Loan was advertising in a Washington, D. C. newspaper and making portraits there. It was during this same period 1844-1847 that some authors claim Samuel Van Loan likely set up shop in Philadelphia. Whatever transpired, both father and son left New York - Samuel to begin his photographic career, and Matthew apparently to bring his to a close. Samuel was receiving favorable editorials in a Philadelphia newspaper in 1849, the same year that his father's former Washington Studio was advertised under the name of another practitioner.

Walton Van Loan, a younger son of Matthew who went with his father to Washington, summarized the salient points of the elder Van Loan's later career in a biographical review: Matthew left Washington to seek new opportunities in California, bringing at least his second wife Julia and young Walton with him. Having worked several years at a Customs job in San Francisco, Matthew D. Van Loan died suddenly following an illness in June 1856, upon which the family returned to Catskill and Walton set up a book shop with his brother. It is unclear if Matthew, once one of the leading daguerreotypists of New York City, ever touched a camera during his last years in California.

Whether because of Matthew's death or because of increased competition in Philadelphia, Samuel Van Loan returned to Catskill with his family by 1857. Setting up his studio on the floor above the shop of his half-brothers, Samuel began advertising using the skylight system first developed by one of the pioneers of Daguerreotype portraiture and popularized by his late father. He continued the business in Catskill at least through 1861, and like many of his peers in the daguerreotype trade Samuel faded into obscurity in the later years of his life. He and his wife Anna passed in 1900 and 1901 in Cairo, New York, and they were buried back in Philadelphia though over forty years had elapsed since their time there.

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

Still Standing: The Friends Meeting House at Athens
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

Local historic sites connected with abolitionist activities in Greene County are precious few and far between. Many older homes in our area are incorrectly associated with legacies they do not actually possess - the most popular and common being the oft-repeated claim that a given building "was a stop on the underground railroad." Such claims are almost never supported by primary sources and often reflect a simple desire to cast an old building in a positive light. In this area it is far more common that the facts demonstrate a building's direct connection to the institution of slavery itself. While that story is equally important, some would deem it much less nice to tell friends about over dinner or to include on a real estate listing, and thus the context and legacy of these buildings becomes obscured, overlooked, or changed entirely.

It is because of this general scarcity of verifiable abolitionist sites that it is exciting to actually stumble across one — especially when that site's connection can be demonstrated through a variety of primary sources and contextual clues. Such is the case with the old Friends Meeting House at Athens, a site associated with the Hicksite Quaker movement and also the location of a lecture given by abolitionist Arnold Buffum in 1833. The old Meeting House survives to the present day as a private residence, but also endures as a site of conscience testifying to the tumultuous national struggle to end the institution of slavery in the United States.

The history of the Quaker movement in this area is too extensive to give a fair account of in the short space of this article, but a fair summarization would be to say that the Society of Friends was well represented in New Baltimore and Athens at the beginning of the 19th Century. The meeting house at Athens, which was probably built within the first two decades of the 19th century, was part of the larger Hudson Monthly Meeting (a meeting being an administrative unit representing members in a geographic area). Likewise there were at least three (possibly four) Meeting Houses used variously in New Baltimore which fell under the the Coeymans Monthly Meeting.

The Athens Meeting was formed during a period of upheaval in the Society of Friends. Inspired by the grassroots protestantism of society member Elias Hicks and the general turmoil of the Second Great Awakening, the members of the Athens meeting chose to espouse a faith that emphasized the importance of the Inner Light possessed by all members which could be cultivated through study and pious living guided in part by the scripture. Hick's controversial emphasis on the cultivation of the Inner Light over the prioritization of scripture earned him opponents, but many found his earnest approach appealing. Elias Hicks was also among those Quakers in the northeast at the forefront of the Abolitionist movement, and his approach to faith espoused and advocated freeing the enslaved.

Hicks himself visited the Athens Meeting at least twice; his journal mentions attending meetings there in March of 1819 and in July of 1829. The 1819 meeting was one which merited a paragraph's description: two were held in one day, and during the latter he

states “a great power of darkness seemed so to prevail” which was only overcome after a long silence by awaiting revelation through his inner light which finally compelled him to rise and speak, thus submitting to “the exaltation of truth’s testimonies.”

It is not known if Hicks spoke on slavery at either meeting, but in September of 1833 the Quakers of Athens extended an invitation to Arnold Buffum for him to speak on the topic of abolition during one of his visits to the Hudson Valley. Buffum was also extended speaking invitations by Trinity Episcopal and the Presbyterian church, but perhaps favored the Athens Hicksites (Buffum being a Quaker himself).

Arnold Buffum was at that time a correspondent at large for William Lloyd Garrison’s abolitionist Newspaper *The Liberator* as well as a lecturing agent for Garrison’s New England Anti-Slavery Society. Garrison and his cohort were among the most extreme of the abolitionists active in the United States during the antebellum period, advocating for an immediate end to slavery and denouncing it as incompatible with democratic and christian values.

This extremist stance, which also categorically denounced such efforts as those espoused by the American Colonization Society, found a ready audience in many places in the Hudson Valley - particularly in the City of Hudson. In the Hudson Methodist Church a large audience had attended an address by Buffum a few days prior to his speaking engagement at Athens. Whether it was because many potential Athens attendees had already heard him at Hudson (or because Athens didn’t have as receptive an audience to the topic) the lecture Buffum gave subsequently at the Friends Meeting House was a relatively small event by his account.

Nonetheless, the invitation the Athens Meeting extended to Buffum was both a reflection of their fidelity to the tenets of their faith and an opportunity to align themselves with Buffum’s cause. What subsequent actions, if any, were taken by the members of the Athens Meeting remains unknown.

The Athens meeting would survive to the dawn of the Progressive Era; the building being sold by the members of the Hudson Monthly Meeting to a private citizen in 1893 after the structure had fallen into disuse. The building was converted to a residence (and possibly a tavern for a short time), and has survived to the present day tucked away on South Montgomery Street near the Athens Senior Center. The humble aspect of the building belies its historic association with the religious revivals and social progressivism that defined the culture of the Quakers who utilized the structure in its earliest years. It was through their association with this building that it endures as a touchstone to connect us with a small piece of the narrative of the great national struggle to abolish slavery in the United States.

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

Roadside History Marker Season By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

It is Roadside History Marker season again, which means I've been spending too much time snooping through online newspaper databases and not much time writing articles for the newspaper. If you've noticed that I've been skipping weekly articles now and then it's because I'd rather send nothing some weeks than resort to sending my good old standby "word barf remarkable only for its dearth of interpretive value"TM.

Quips about article frequency and article quality aside, History Marker Season should be a time to celebrate and lay bare the truth concerning the ridiculous amount of time often required to uncover and relate any interpretation of the facts of the past. No doubt at some point in your life you have heard some bespectacled fan of tweed jackets tout the value of "primary sources" and "archival documents" as a crucial part of the process of researching a quality history. Rooting to find those authentic original pieces of a puzzle which can never be fully reassembled is part of what makes being a historian fun. The more puzzle pieces we uncover, the closer we approach to developing a clear and authentic picture of the past. This analogy is of course a gross oversimplification (and the reality is that those puzzle pieces can easily be selectively misused) but most of us are just trying our honest best to root around, find neat things, and then tell you all about it.

Take for example my current research topic - the wreck of the steamboat *SWALLOW* which sank at Athens in April 1845. This isn't exactly a hot new topic or previously undiscovered story - you can google the name of the boat and find a variety of online articles about it. What is new is that I'd like to get a nice shiny Roadside History Marker to commemorate the disaster, and I need to know exactly where to put it.

When the *SWALLOW* struck a rock and sank in April of 1845 the disaster was indelibly etched in the memories of those in the community who witnessed it and went to rescue survivors. Descriptions in newspapers of the period told of the ship striking a rock "opposite Athens" or "at Athens" or "Near the Athens shore" probably because those descriptions of the disaster were being given to the newspapers secondhand. The rock the *SWALLOW* hit, which was variously called Dooper's or Doper's Island, Noah's Brig, and Swallow Rock, was obviously a very real place - but in the 180 years since the disaster folks seemed to simply lose track of it under the misguided assumption that nobody could possibly lose track of such a notable spot. Imagine an entire community misplacing an island.

I grew up in Athens under the assumption that Swallow Rock was removed in the late 19th or early 20th century as an obstruction to navigation. This turns out to only be partially true. It appears, after spending about five hours combing through newspaper archives, that at some point Swallow Rock was partially broken up to be incorporated for fill at the site of one of the many Ice Houses that once dotted the Athens Waterfront. The last mention of the island as an island appears in July 1868, when a

Hudson newspaper carried notice of a boy drowning at “Swallow Rock” and noted the unsuccessful rescue attempt of the Knickerbocker Ice Company agent nearby. At some point after 1868 and before 1882 the rest of Swallow Rock was subsumed by fill along the river shore and became part of the grounds of another ice house. Two articles from the 1880s corroborate its disappearance.

In 1938 Sam Van Aken, an aged boatbuilder living at Athens, gave a narrative tour for a local paper and described the Athens waterfront walking from Murderer’s Creek south on the winter ice. Among his descriptions of points of interest was mention of the site of the *SWALLOW* disaster - pinpointing the location in the same vicinity as a small island which appeared in an 1867 map of the Village. While more research is needed to confirm this, it seems that Swallow Rock endures to the present day as a point of land now entirely incorporated into the mainland but extant nonetheless.

Thus, I now have a pretty good idea after (hours and hours of research) as to where I’m going to put this new Roadside History Marker. Now I just need to figure out what the marker should say. Happy Roadside History Marker season.

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

Pelataiah Fitch and the Quasi-War with France
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

In the Fall of 1796 there was much ado along the river shore where the Village of Athens now stands. In a small shipyard at old Loonenburg business partners Pelataiah Fitch and Rufus Backus had commissioned the construction of a sloop which onlookers and friends observed to be of uncommonly good quality. Fitch and Backus' new sloop was appointed with a large hold, fine passenger cabins, and general craftsmanship which evidenced the skill of local shipwrights. Indeed it seemed the new vessel perfectly matched the diverse requirements of two men seeking riches in the volatile economy of the post-revolutionary Atlantic world.

The close of the American Revolution, which secured a tenuous independence for the fledgling United States, placed the new Union in an uncomfortable middle ground between two superpowers. On one side stood Great Britain, indebted and humbled by a protracted war but nonetheless tied by culture and trade to its former North American colonies. On the other side was France, the savior and ally of the American cause lately and alarmingly wracked by its own extreme and increasingly violent revolutionary fervor. Great Britain and France were bonded only by increasing enmity, and American merchants sought to forge their own path through this diplomatic minefield by seeking trade opportunities with both.

Attempts by Americans to play both sides went increasingly awry for a variety of reasons as the 1790s progressed. Beginning in 1792 Great Britain and France were once again engaged in open conflict during the War of the First Coalition (1792-1797) and it was in the midst of this that the United States also ceased payments on loans given by the French Monarchy during the American Revolution. As France descended deeper into turmoil during the ongoing French Revolution (1789-1799) it became less clear whether debts Congress owed to the French Monarchy were to be honored following the declaration of the French Republic and the execution of King Louis XVI.

Adding insult to injury, the United States entered into a treaty with Great Britain in 1794 negotiated by John Jay which settled lingering diplomatic issues and deepened economic ties between the former colonies and England. Critics at home and abroad saw adoption of the treaty at best as a concession by Congress and more scathingly as a counterrevolutionary step for the young nation. The French Republic likewise understood Jay's Treaty to be in practical conflict with a preexisting treaty signed in 1778 between France and the United States. In response to this perceived betrayal by their ally, the French began attacking and seizing American shipping on the Atlantic and in the Caribbean in October of 1796 and touched off a heated and costly undeclared naval conflict which would go down in history as the Quasi War.

This is all to say that by the time Pelataiah Fitch and Rufus Backus' sloop was completed at Loonenburg in December 1796 all was not well on the high seas. Nonetheless, temptation of good profits caused Fitch and Backus to send the newly

commissioned sloop *HIRAM* on her maiden voyage from the Hudson Valley to Jamaica under the command of Sylvester Baldwin in January 1797.

What Fitch and Backus could not have perceived was that when the *HIRAM* sailed from New York Harbor it would never make port there again. Instead, the maiden voyage of their sloop would set in motion a chain of events that would embroil Fitch in court cases and hearings for much of the rest of his life and entangle him and his heirs forever in the legacy of this undeclared global conflict.

Part Two will follow. Questions and comments can be directed to Jon via Archivist@gchistory.org

Pelataiah Fitch and the Quasi-War with France, Part II
By Jonathan Palmer, Green County Historian

When the sails of the frigate *L'HARMONIE* appeared over the horizon in late January of 1797, Captain Sylvester Baldwin could not have immediately discerned from the deck of the *HIRAM* if the sails were tidings of a friend or foe. The crowded waters of the Greater Antilles were filled with vessels of all variety and purpose, and it was Baldwin's objective to merely ensure the safe arrival of a cargo in Jamaica to satisfy his contract with Pelataiah Fitch and Rufus Backus. Success in that task meant avoiding interactions with mystery vessels, lest those sails prove to be a privateer or unfriendly warship.

Commander Simon Billiette on the deck of *L'HARMONIE* would have likewise found the appearance of the sails of Baldwin's ship of interest, but only because the sail plan made the *HIRAM*'s design and purpose as a merchant sloop almost immediately apparent. As such, it was clear the *HIRAM* would make an easy prize for the crew of a 1400-ton 44 gun frigate whose mission was to intercept shipping bound for Great Britain's island colonies. By the end of the day Sylvester Baldwin and his crew were prisoners of the French Republic and the *HIRAM* was on its way to Saint-Domingue under the command of a detachment of French sailors. Pelataiah Fitch's ship and cargo would never reach Jamaica as intended.

At "Le Cap" probably (Cap-Haïtien/Français) a Prize Court was convened by the French colonial government to review the circumstances of the capture of the *HIRAM* and to determine if the ship was a lawful prize. Such proceedings were a convention of naval warfare in the 18th and 19th centuries which served to ultimately determine if a captain and crew were entitled to financial reward for the seizure of valuable enemy ships and cargo.

That the *HIRAM* sailed under the flag of the neutral United States had no apparent bearing on the proceedings - the sloop's manifest and destination of Jamaica were enough to satisfy the commissioners that: "the said ship the *HIRAM*, Captain Silvester Baldwin, captured the 30th Nivose [possibly 19th January] last by the frigate *L'HARMONIE*, commanded by Billiette and brought in the port of Borgne, is a good prize, as well as her cargo and all what belongs to her." Whether Captain Baldwin protested that his crew and ship were neutral is unknown, but as no official state of war existed between France and the United States the entire affair must have been singularly shocking and infuriating to Baldwin and his men.

Within the next month a sale of the *HIRAM* as a war prize had been arranged. The French colonial Government sold Fitch's brand-new sloop to a French citizen named Jean Baptiste Loire and his business partner David Ross both residing in the city of Philadelphia. Whether the commissioners in Saint-Domingue had any preexisting arrangement with Loire is unknown, but the odd twist of an American merchant ship being taken as a prize by the French and then sold back to merchants in America with a connection to the French Republic is emblematic of the complicated state of

international affairs. At any rate, Pelatiah Fitch and Rufus Backus were made aware of the capture and loss of their sloop within months of the occurrence, prompting Rufus Backus to claim insurance on his portion of the lost cargo and assigning Fitch sole ownership over the remaining value of the *HIRAM* itself and the cargo it contained.

Fitch, for his part, commenced attempts to recover the *HIRAM* when word reached him of the Sloop's arrival in Philadelphia under the ownership of Loire and Ross. His effort, which on its face appeared to be a simple attempt at reclaiming stolen property, would end up becoming an odyssey of court cases, petitions, and congressional reports. Almost a century later Fitch's case would remain unresolved, much to the consternation of Judge John Sanderson and Fitch's granddaughter Sarah Shaw of Athens. Part three will follow.

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

Pelataiah Fitch and the Quasi-War with France, Part III
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

Having arrived at part three of this story, many of you are perhaps wondering what this tale has to do with Greene County. For starters, it might be useful to explain how I found out about Mr. Fitch. Our unfortunate shipless friend died at home in Athens dreaming of his long lost boat sometime in 1833. As a deceased man with the perfect trifecta of unfinished business, money, and heirs it then fell to the Greene County Surrogate's Court to appoint an administrator to make a fair assessment and disburse Fitch's estate.

Regrettably for his estate (and fortunately for us) Fitch's earthly affairs remained tied up in ongoing attempts by his family to seek restitution for the loss of the *HIRAM*, which may have totaled as much as \$6,000 when the ship was taken in 1797. As such, Fitch's granddaughter Sarah Shaw, also of Athens, was still pressing the case as Fitch's administratrix in the 1880s.

The claim concerning the *HIRAM* was, even at that time, one minor thread in the complex story of the French Spoliation Claims. The spoliation claims are a patchwork of diplomatic wrangling, congressional hearings, court cases, and stacks of paper in disparate government archives so complicated it would make the Byzantines blush. It all had to do with attempts by the United States Government and private citizens all seeking damages for ships taken as prizes during the Quasi War. The total amount of damages sought is often given as \$20,000,000.00 (!) and I have no figure for the number of vessels which fell victim to French commerce raiding, but some totals for claimants kept by Congress approach 6,000 distinct incidents. Quite a big deal considering the war was only "quasi"!

Anyway, Sarah Shaw fortunately kept a file of all of the various court cases her grandfather was engaged in. First Fitch tried to get his boat back, and then when that failed he tried to get someone to pay for it. These efforts alone resulted in some wild paperwork, including a report by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams in 1824 giving a summary and conclusions about whether or not Congress had a financial obligation to Fitch for his loss of the *HIRAM*. Adams determined Fitch wasn't owed a cent by the government, and much to Fitch's probable dismay Adams was elected President within a year during the chaotic election of 1824.

This all again came to a head yet again when congress passed an act to allow the Court of Claims to hear french spoliation claims in 1885. Sarah Shaw and County Surrogate John Sanderson, a judge from Athens, decided that it was time to press their case yet again. In this effort they were more or less successful, finally allowing the family to resolve Pelataiah Fitch's estate over a century after the *HIRAM* was taken and more than seventy years after Fitch's death. Fortunately, that meant all of the various papers and court cases concerning the *HIRAM* went into Mr. Fitch's file - so rather than this story being lost and scattered among various federal and state archives, we got

more or less the entire thing sitting on a shelf in three fat folders waiting for someone to come along and browse through it.

As to other things on which this story sheds light: I was unaware that sloops built in the mid-Hudson Valley ranged so far and wide in their trade. That we have such good documentation about a sloop, its quality and cost, and the type of business in which it engaged is really a boon for contextualizing this important moment in our regional and economic history. Here we have a vessel of a largely vernacular design suited to the Hudson River making voyages to the Caribbean through investment by small trading firms.

Oddly, neither Fitch nor his partner Rufus Backus ever specified what the *HIRAM*'s cargo was in any of their court proceedings or summaries of the loss. I can give no reason or account for this, only speculations. That an Athens businessman would be sending a vessel to Jamaica in the late 1790s is in and of itself a remarkable revelation. There was no business going in the 1790s in Jamaica that wasn't directly tied to the particularly brutal form of slavery practiced on the island's sugar plantations. It is very probable that the *HIRAM*, like many ships from the northeast bound for Jamaica, was carrying food stuffs or livestock to the island - as Jamaica's arable land was primarily devoted to growing sugar cane rather than food to sustain the enslaved.

In this way the saga of the *HIRAM* allows us both a window into a complex moment in our national history as well as clues about the nature of our forbears in this place. To top it all off I'm always in for a good sea story.

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

The Historic Coxsackie Village Cemetery
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

Long time no chat, everyone! I'm back after a monthlong hiatus from article writing. First order of business is to thank everyone who came out for the two excellent fundraiser events offered this past weekend in Coxsackie's old Mansion Street Cemetery and Athens' Mount Hope Cemetery. Attendance was exceptional and healthy sums were raised towards ongoing preservation and maintenance efforts at these two historic burial grounds. "A good time was had by all."

In preparing materials for the tour of the Mansion Street Cemetery, the opportunity was finally presented for me to comb through the extensive file of paperwork related to the organization of this graveyard in 1826. This non-denominational community cemetery, which is an interesting intersectional example of the evolution of cemetery architecture and organization, might be the earliest Village Cemetery in the county for which we have a relatively intact paper trail concerning its founding and early management.

Community cemeteries like the Mansion Street Cemetery (more properly styled the Coxsackie Village Cemetery) and the Village Cemetery on Thomson Street in Catskill embody the beginnings of a 19th century trend which culminated in the Rural Cemetery movement. These intersectional cemeteries, with lots sold by subscription in a manner similar to later association cemeteries, were meant to illustrate the prominence of their respective communities and manifest a tangible aspect of their civil structure and dedication to community planning. Surveyed lots and management of internments also prevented the overcrowding that caused sanitary issues in many older informal municipal burying grounds, churchyards, and family cemeteries.

Despite embodying these many forward-thinking concepts, the Coxsackie Village Cemetery didn't fully realize all of the aesthetic and architectural ideals evident in true Rural Cemeteries designed later in the antebellum period. While it is true that Coxsackie Village Cemetery shows evidence of then-innovative surveying and management techniques, it nonetheless forgoes a true rural cemetery design meant to embrace the landscape with rolling paths and contoured layouts. Instead, the Village Cemetery clings to old traditions like east-west burial orientation and a grid layout. Monuments within the cemetery also illustrate the evolution of custom and taste, ranging from the most traditional brownstone tablet markers common in old New England to elegant marble obelisks in the Egyptian revival style with late 19th-century granite monoliths interspersed throughout.

While the Coxsackie Village Cemetery's architecture certainly helps to illustrate how it occupies an evolutionary middle ground, the administrative structure that allowed for its creation is perhaps the best local example of the period of evolution and change in which it was created. The Catskill Village Cemetery, which is older by 15 years, was created within the bounds of the incorporated Village of Catskill in 1811 at the instigation of the trustees of the Village. As such, that non-denominational community

cemetery was entirely managed by a local government outside of the context of any of the churches and religious organizations that then called Catskill home.

Such was not the case in Coxsackie. While the settlement where the Village of Coxsackie now stands evolved in a manner similar to Catskill in the years following the Revolutionary War, it wouldn't be until 1867 that a village was incorporated to create a distinct administrative entity over the bounds of this historic riverfront settlement. What this meant was that in 1826 the community living around the landings at Coxsackie had no recourse when they sought to form a non-denominational community cemetery like Catskill as there was no village government to accomplish it under the auspices of.

The need for a new community cemetery couldn't be ignored however, so planning proceeded under a committee of men associated with the First Reformed Church. This committee was vested with broad support from their fellow citizens (regardless of religious affiliation), and in short order they had identified a parcel of land that would suit their needs owned by Simeon Fitch.

The committee drafted an agreement signed 28 March 1826 by twenty-one subscribers who were influential members of the community, all pledging amounts towards the purchase and preparation of "a piece of ground as a place of burial in a convenient situation to accommodate the inhabitants of the village of Coxsackie, and the landings and those in the vicinity." The term "Village" was used in this case merely to allude to the density of the settlement and not the existence of an incorporated community.

The next step was to buy the land, and the committee transacted a deed with Simeon Fitch, but in this deed they represented themselves as members of the First Reformed Church of Coxsackie. There may be several possible reasons for this sudden appearance of a church in an otherwise non-denominational process. The State of New York didn't pass a law to allow for the incorporation of private cemetery associations until 1847, and the committee may not have felt they were empowered to purchase the land themselves under these specific provisions outside the umbrella of an existing organization. Thus, in lieu of another stable legal entity like a village government, the committee probably utilized the First Reformed Church to simply transact the deed, though the Church wasn't directly involved in subsequent management.

The surviving financial papers of the committee, charged with organizing what they then called the "New Burying Ground," are fascinating in their detail. Receipts for the sale of lots, a manuscript map showing lots with their respective owners, and documentation concerning the workmen and labor involved with preparing the property for its use as a graveyard all survive in the archives at the Vedder Research Library. Most notable are several interesting receipts concerning the construction of a hearse for the cemetery and a barn to store it in on the property. Where this barn stood and what the exact appearance of this hearse was are lost to time, but they testify to the comprehensive nature of the plan for the Village Cemetery, where provisions were even made for the removal of the dead to the graveyard in an age before undertaking

services and funeral parlors were a common component of modern mortuary practices.

Today a committee of concerned citizens continues to manage the Coxsackie Village Cemetery, though their task is no longer burial of the dead but the preservation of a historic community feature. The Cemetery was filled, went defunct, and was abandoned for many years, and it is only thanks to recent efforts spearheaded by Village Historian Betty Cure and Retired Greene County Historian David Dorpfeld that the old Village Cemetery is now returning to its former beauty.

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

The Marquis de La Fayette Visits Catskill
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

Those of you who have been past the Greene County Courthouse over the last month might have noticed the new roadside history marker on the front lawn near the intersections of Main and Bridge Streets. This marker, which commemorates the visit of General Lafayette to Catskill during his 1824-25 Farewell Tour of the United States, is one in a growing series of markers across the eastern United States honoring this historic event. The new red, white, and blue marker in Catskill is number 80 in this developing series.

Lafayette's visit was a momentous occasion not just because Lafayette was one of the Nation's first great celebrities, but also due to Lafayette's distinction as being one of the last living heroes of the American Revolution. As the nation approached its fiftieth anniversary patriotic sentiments were at an all-time high. A new generation of statesmen and politicians were busy contesting the inherited burden of perpetuating American democracy, and the public was keenly sensitive to the bittersweet reality of a young nation which was suddenly on the cusp of outliving the people who had first initiated the democratic experiment. In the midst of this turmoil and against the backdrop of the chaotic election of 1824 appears the Marquis de Lafayette, one of the last living field commanders of the Revolution who was instrumental in securing French assistance during the war. To say that the American public was excited by his arrival would be a gross understatement of the unparalleled celebratory receptions he received at every stop in every state he visited.

In the four decades since his last visit to the United States Lafayette had committed himself wholeheartedly to perpetuating the democratic ideals which had first drawn him as an 18-year-old youth to the American Cause. He had leveraged his personal wealth, safety, and social standing on battlefields in America and in the Estates-General of the ill-fated French Republic. He had dined with Kings and served time as a political prisoner, and throughout maintained a dignity and self-assurance in his cause that elevated him to near-irreproachable hero status in both the nation of his birth and his adoptive United States. Lafayette created the original draft of the French Republic's Declaration of the Rights of Man, and steered a middle road through the violence of the French Revolution which won him enemies in both Jacobin and Monarchist circles. His return to the United States in advance of the nation's fiftieth anniversary was conducted at the invitation of President James Monroe.

News of Lafayette's journey up the Hudson aboard the steamboat *JAMES KENT* reached Catskill well ahead of the Marquis himself, and by five in the morning on September 17, 1824 the entire village was already awake making final preparations in anticipation of the General's arrival. People had come to Catskill from miles around hoping to catch a glimpse of the celebrated Revolutionary, but a whirlwind schedule only permitted Lafayette to make the most brief visit by carriage up from the Point to Main Street. In front of the hotel of retired newspaperman Mackay Croswell the General was greeted by a large crowd and a committee of politicians and dignitaries from

across Greene County. Among those gathered were several “76ers” who had served in the revolution, including one Mr. Samuel Foster whom it is claimed attended to Lafayette at the Battle of Brandywine where the Marquis had been wounded.

Newspaper accounts of the visit vary wildly in the detail, but all note how unfortunately brief Lafayette’s visit was despite the preparations the village had made. This was due not necessarily to Lafayette’s itinerary, which for two years and through every state that then existed had been jam-packed, but rather because every place he stopped insisted on celebrating his arrival and commemorating his legacy. For Americans in 1824, witnessing Lafayette was tantamount to seeing Washington himself. As Lafayette Biographer Harlow Giles Unger put it: “It was a mystical experience they would relate to their heirs through generations to come. Lafayette had materialized from a distant age, the last leader and hero at the nation's defining moment. They knew they and the world would never see his kind again.”

Special thanks is due to Julien Icher of the Lafayette Trail, Inc. who initiated the process and compiled research to help get Greene County this marker free of cost back in 2019. The placement of this marker on the lawn of the Greene County Courthouse is both a reflection of the location where Lafayette met the citizens of this place, as well as an acknowledgement of the local seat of democratic governance that follows in the spirit of those like Lafayette.

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

The Irish Colleens of Saint Joseph's Chapel
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

Near the Ashland/Prattsville Town Line overlooking the valley of the Batavia Kill stands a small chapel and churchyard on a rise above State Route 23. Passersby generally pay no heed to it as they travel past at sixty miles an hour, but for those who catch the sign "Oldest Catholic Church in the Catskills" and take time to stop the rewards are manifold. Saint Joseph's chapel claims to have been built around 1800 during the earliest years of the settlement of Old Windham, and one might believe it to see the full churchyard with gravestones edging right up to the building's walls. One stone in particular stands out — a granite shamrock upon which is carved the following:

"Irish Colleens; In loving memory of the 14 Irish girls who came from Ireland in the 1800s and who tragically lost their lives in a fire they are buried here in a mass grave. May God bless them and hold them in the palm of his hand."

The passage is repeated in Irish directly below. The humbling spectacle of the oldest Catholic Church in the Catskills paired with this marker near its entrance would create a particularly poetic and stirring composition were it not for some inconvenient details... Saint Joseph's is not the oldest church in the Catskills, and the tragedy of the fourteen Irish Colleens never happened.

The marker to the Irish Colleens of Ashland is responsible for fomenting at least one or two inquiries annually by phone and email to the Greene County Historical Society. The story also invariably gets recycled now and again on social media. Countless people have offered speculation and possible avenues of research to uncover more details about this tragic yet vaguely contextualized disaster, but none have borne fruit and no local historian has ever found a lead. Thus, in order to finally put this myth to bed we must first consider the facts surrounding the industrialization of the Northern Catskills, the development of the Irish immigrant community in Prattsville and Ashland, and the origins of Saint Joseph's Chapel itself.

The story of the arrival of formal Catholic services in Greene County is tied hand in hand with the creation of the great tanneries of Hunter and Prattsville in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century. William Edwards' New York Tannery at Hunter village is widely considered to be the great pioneer of that industry and was put in operation in 1817 with backing from investors in New York City. The New York Tannery and others like it created a considerable demand for labor in the tanneries themselves and in adjacent trades. With every tannery that opened so followed a legion of tanners, carpenters, blacksmiths, drovers, bark-peelers, mechanics and the like — all added to the growing tally of skilled and unskilled labor rapidly filling the Northern Catskills.

At Hunter as early as 1830 it is claimed there was a large enough immigrant Irish Catholic contingent among the laborers there to merit the occasional visit of a Priest from Albany, which was then part of the New York Diocese. By 1839 those congregants

were so numerous that a subscription was raised to secure funds for the construction of a church. This culminated in the completion of Saint Mary of the Mountain as the first Catholic Church in Greene County with Rev. Bernard O'Farrell as pastor the following Spring. Two years later in 1842, following the appointment of Rev. Michael Gilbride as the second pastor at Saint Mary's, work was begun to create a mission chapel to service the growing Catholic contingent at Red Falls — a small hamlet east of Prattsville village along the Batavia Kill.

The Metropolitan Catholic Almanac first lists a church at Scienceville (the old name for Ashland) on the directory of Catholic houses of worship in the New York Diocese in 1843. The church at Hunter had been listed previously beginning in 1840, making Saint Mary of the Mountain the oldest Catholic Church in Greene County and Saint Joseph's Chapel a close second. With the demolition of Saint Mary's in 2017 the chapel at Ashland can now safely claim oldest *surviving* Catholic church in the County, though by no stretch of the imagination could it ever be dated to "circa 1800" — eight years before the Diocese of New York was even formed.

Part two will follow. Questions and comments can be directed to Jon via archivist@gchistory.org

The Irish Colleens of Saint Joseph's Chapel, Part II
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

(This is part two of a three-part article concerning the legend of the Irish Colleens of Ashland. Part one summarized the origins of the Irish Catholic community in the northern Catskills and the creation of the Catholic church at Hunter, New York.)

The need for a church at Red Falls was precipitated by the same type of development that had fomented the rise of an Irish Catholic community at Hunter. The vast tannery of Zadock Pratt at Prattsville (established in 1825) and one run by Foster Morss and his son Burton (established in 1830) at Red Falls were catalysts for the development of those communities, but they soon became just one part of the rapidly evolving industrial landscape in that section of the mountains during the Antebellum period. By 1850 Prattsville and the newly formed town of Ashland sported a cotton mill and two hat factories in addition to a number of lumber and grist mills, a developing cottage dairy industry, and the old established forest industries.

It should be said before we continue that the most important piece of evidence that the Irish Colleens tragedy never occurred is the fact that it was never recorded, reported, or recollected by anyone in the time since the event could have transpired. Fourteen women dying in a fire would be the second greatest disaster behind the Twilight Inn fire to have ever occurred in the County's history, not to mention being the greatest industrial disaster to ever occur here. Such things do not get omitted from collective memory, nor were such stories overlooked by newspapers.

Disasters such as the one alluded to by the Irish Colleens monument were the catnip of newspaper editors in the 19th century. Editors reported every disaster to befall their respective communities - be it housewives catching fire while tending the stove, children drowning, uninsured warehouses burning down, or people dying of hydrophobia - and if such disasters weren't befalling their readership then editors simply copied disaster news from other papers around the country. The reason for this was of course because at the end of the day disasters sold papers. People would have gobbled up the tale of fourteen immolated Irish women in the Catskills. No such disaster can be located in any newspaper database, and no mill or tannery in that area ever burned with the loss of any woman's life.

It is important in supplement to this glaring lack of evidence to establish whether a scenario ever could have existed in which fourteen Irish immigrant women could have been killed in a fire - be it in a mill, boarding house, or otherwise. This analysis begins with the 1850 United States Census, being the census immediately following the height of the Potato Famine (when the Irish immigrant population should have been proportionately high) and subsequent to the 1848 opening of Burton Morss' cotton mill at Red Falls. The 1850 Census is also the first in which every member of a household is listed with their place of birth.

What that census illustrates broadly is the following: a little over 6% of the population of Prattsville claimed to be Irish immigrants (≈ 125 persons out of 1,989 people), while a little over 2% of Ashland's population (≈ 29 of 1,290 people) listed Ireland as their place of birth. Of those people, the Irish immigrants were predominantly members of family groups in which one or both of the parents were immigrants whose children were mostly or exclusively born in the United States. Irish immigrants not living in a family setting were predominantly unattached men working in industry or household servants and boarders generally numbering no more than one or two persons in the homes of established local families. One home in Ashland contained six immigrant Irish men with no clear trade specified living with Solomon Christian, a local farmer with a young family.

The 1855 New York State census illustrates some interesting changes. Roughly 5.2% of Prattsville's population reported their birthplace as Ireland (≈ 84 of 1588), while just under 2% of Ashland does the same (≈ 20 of 1094). This decrease, particularly in the Town of Prattsville, may have been due to the closure of some local tanneries and the transformation of the economic landscape of the town. Broadly the same fact remains constant however that most Irish immigrants lived within family units or were otherwise unattached males living as boarders. Several more unattached young women or daughters of families living elsewhere in town are listed working as servants with established local families.

The 1855 census interestingly also lists a Roman Catholic church at Ashland with an attendance of about 150 congregants — this number is roughly equivalent to the total number of Irish-American families living between Prattsville and Ashland who could have been potential congregants. This assumes for example that the fifty or so children appearing in households where at least one parent was an Irish immigrant in Prattsville would make up a portion of those attending while also not accounting for those practicing Catholicism who were not Irish-American.

The next census examined was the 1865 New York State Census following the Civil War. In this census surprisingly only 2% of the population of Prattsville reported their birthplace as Ireland, and in Ashland eight people stated they were Irish immigrants. These decreases correspond with a continuing decrease in the total populations of each town. Notably the Roman Catholic church is not listed as an active congregation at this time, though it reappears in later censuses. As with previous years those born in Ireland are almost exclusively part of family groups or servants in households of established local families.

The 1870 United States Census, 1875 New York Census, and 1880 United States Census all continue to illustrate this trend of general decline in percentages of the population of Prattsville and Ashland who reported their birthplace as Ireland. By 1880 nobody reports their birthplace as Ireland in either town. Though this may reflect minor reporting or recording biases it nonetheless illustrates how rapidly the initial Irish-American community associated with Saint Joseph's appears and then disappears.

Cumulatively, these censuses illustrate that it would have been highly irregular in the years following the organization of Saint Joseph's Chapel for fourteen immigrant Irish women to have found themselves in a scenario where they all could have died in a fire. While an event at a workplace would certainly be most likely, any fire that could have occurred would have killed more people than exclusively Irish immigrants. Take for example Burton Morss' cotton mill, which was the largest employer at Red Falls, with a claimed figure of forty women and thirty men employed while it operated between 1848 and 1881. It is evident from the 1850, 1855, and 1865 censuses that the mill employed both men and women, and that many people from established local families worked alongside those who had been born elsewhere. Likewise, boarding houses in the area seemed to have catered to both men and women and boarders didn't hail exclusively from one region or place of birth.

Part three will follow. Questions and comments can be directed to Jon via archivist@gchistory.org

The Irish Colleens of Saint Joseph's Chapel, Part III
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

(This is part three of a three-part article. In part two the author demonstrated that the census corroborates the unlikelihood of it ever having been possible during the period following the organization of Saint Joseph's chapel for fourteen unattached Irish women to be killed together in a fire.)

While this is all quite interesting it should come as no surprise that all evidence stands in contrast to the tale related on the Irish Colleens monument. In fact the only surprise here seems to be the monument itself, which so far as can be discerned appeared along the staircase to the chapel sometime in the 1990s. An inquiry submitted by a researcher to the Greene County Historical Society in 2009 notes the appearance of the marker "about ten or fifteen years ago" and relates his desire to confirm the circumstances it commemorates. The marker pairs odd specifics (fourteen women) with useless dates ("the 1800s") and omits where the disaster happened, only that there was a fire. Frankly the monument reads more like the end result of a children's game of telephone... and that analogy may not be far from the truth of its origins.

At some point probably in the 1950s or 1960s a poem was written by Robert Boughter of Windham lamenting the "haves and have nots" tale of the Irish immigrants who came to work in the mountains in the nineteenth century. His poem to the memory of the Irish Colleens, while not exemplary of the form, is a poignant and earnest tribute to the story Boughter understood to be the truth about the people who came to work in Red Falls at Burton Morss' cotton mill. He paints a vision of the classic New England textile mill wherein floor upon floor of immigrant women and girls from the countryside toiled away in despair on behalf of fat cat bosses.

In Boughter's poem those women die in anonymity after having lived a life of anonymity, being buried as he puts it "beneath chips of native stone" while nearby "stands granite great and tall to plainly mark the resting place of those who had it all." He closes with an admonition to the reader that a marker should also be placed to commemorate those women, not alluding however to any disaster or mass grave. Boughter simply laments the tragedy of the scores of uninscribed fieldstones marking their burials, assuming without evidence that many represented the unattached "Irish Colleens" with neither family nor means to adorn their own graves. The mountains are loaded with cemeteries containing scores of unmarked headstones made from native fieldstone slabs, and it will take considerable further study to determine if this phenomenon is socioeconomic, an expression of piety, or some mixture of the two. Either way it was not a phenomenon unique to Saint Joseph's or the Irish Catholic community in Red Falls.

Boughter is of course imposing his own expectations on what the nature of the working community at Red Falls was during the mid-19th century and assuming that primarily imported labor comprised Burton Morss' workforce. As said previously the censuses of 1850, 1855, and 1865 plainly illustrate this was not the case. Were Boughter's vision of

the past correct, this would have required nearly fifty percent of the Irish immigrant community in Ashland and Prattsville at its peak circa 1850 (roughly 150 people total) to be employed just at Morss' mill, never mind all the other places those people listed as their actual occupations. Moreover, the cotton mill operated until 1881, well after the population reporting their birthplace as Ireland in both towns had dwindled to virtually zero. This all aside, it is important to remind everyone again that none of the mills there ever burned with catastrophic loss of life.

When Boughter died in 1983 he was laid to rest in the back of the cemetery at Saint Joseph's among the "chips of native stone" he fancied as being the markers of the Irish Colleens. On his grave he had inscribed "The Irish Colleens" followed by his own epitaph "In Memory of Robert Boughter, 1896-1983." In this way his own grave finally fulfilled the need he perceived for a marker to honor the women central to the story he contrived of the mill at Red Falls. This makes the subsequent appearance of the Irish Colleens monument not only somewhat redundant, but also illustrative of a progression in the evolution of an already somewhat imaginative vision of the past. Thus the Irish Colleens monument stands today an expression of misconstrued recollection rather than a long-overdue tribute to an actual tragedy.

History of course is merely our conversation with the available facts of the past. The discovery of new details can move that conversation in many directions, but the conversation only bears fruit if we act in concert with the evidence at hand. Perhaps it is time — out of respect to the legitimate story of the Irish Catholic community that once called this corner of the Catskills home — to finally put this legend to rest.

Email Jon at archivist@gchistory.org

The Wreck of the SWALLOW

By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

On the snowy evening of April 7, 1845 the steamboat *SWALLOW* departed her dock at Albany loaded with approximately 250 passengers bound overnight for the City of New York. Fashionable and fast, the *SWALLOW* offered businesspeople and time-conscious travelers one of the fastest and most comfortable conveyances between the capital of New York State and its unofficial business capital at New York City. The evening route was intended to leave passengers rested and ready the next morning to conduct business at their respective destinations. None knew the journey would end a short two hours later in a cataclysm of shattered timbers, fire, and water — a tragedy summoned by a culture of heedless profiteering endemic to the operation of the steamboats of that age.

The *SWALLOW* was owned jointly by “*The People’s Line of Steamboats on the North River*” and “*The Troy and New York Steamboat Association*.” Daily operations were orchestrated by the Association, a profit-minded assembly of investors including approximately one hundred shareholders with a board of five trustees and three directors. Naturally, much of the decision making behind the operation of the *SWALLOW* emphasized publicity and revenue over passenger safety.

The speed of the *SWALLOW*, like many of her contemporaries, was an important selling point and a subject of pride among her stakeholders and management. Following a refit at the end of the 1844 season it was held that the *SWALLOW* could make upwards of seventeen miles per hour as her top speed — quite fast for that time. This was known because she and competitor steamboats frequently undertook unofficial races which jeopardized the safety of boatloads of paying customers in the name of attracting more passengers to a winning boat on a subsequent trip. By the mid-1840s such races were technically illegal, but no system existed to identify and address those who continued the practice.

While winning steamboats certainly made the headlines in regional papers with regularity, so too did news of the alarmingly frequent disasters that befell boats which were pushed too hard. Boiler explosions, fires, groundings, and collisions appeared in the news just as often as headlines concerning triumphs and broken speed records. The potential for disaster was compounded by flaws in the way steamboat officers were selected. As one example of this systemic problem the pilot of the *SWALLOW*, William Burnett, was previously “addicted to the use of ardent spirits” though he claimed to have had only one beer while on board the vessel that fateful night. This same pilot had run the *SWALLOW* aground twice in the past and once sank a sloop in a collision. All of this culminated in his previous dismissal from the post for negligence. His subsequent reappointment prior to the disaster illustrates just how flawed the corporate culture was that would place a man in a role they were demonstrably ill suited for.

In the same Senate report that describes pilot Burnett's previous struggles with alcoholism and sloops appears a scathing indictment of the entire command structure common among Hudson River Steamboats at that time. The Captain, contrary to every obvious principle concerning the management of a ship, did not have clear authority over the Pilot and Engineer, effectively rendering him a figurehead with more responsibility over the management of passengers than the actual navigation and operation of the vessel. Indeed the tradition of Ships Pursers being elevated to the position of Captain among Hudson River Steamboats endured long after the *SWALLOW* met its end. With no single experienced person clearly in command there was no possibility of sound judgement ruling difficult or dangerous situations. Then again, it shouldn't have been a grand question as to whether running at speed was a prudent idea on a dark snowy night.

This fatally flawed command structure, paired with a desire among stakeholders and crew alike for speed, had already doomed the *SWALLOW* as she rushed southward through the night. The *SWALLOW* rapidly outpaced the *ROCHESTER* and *EXPRESS*, fellow night boats which had left Albany at the same time, and likely made an average of fourteen miles per hour the entirety of the distance between Albany and a rocky outcropping called Dooper's Island along the shoreline at Athens, New York. Around eight in the evening residents of Athens and Hudson alike were woken by a crash heard at least a mile in all directions. Within moments those near the banks of the River in Athens observed the glow of flames that briefly illuminated the silhouette of a steamship, its bow driven over thirty feet into the air upon a rock and quickly sinking by the stern. Passengers poured out onto the decks, many chancing the water to make distance from the wreck lest it continue to burn. The stern sank within five minutes, extinguishing the boilers and nascent fire and plunging all into darkness.

Part Two will follow next week. Questions and comments can be directed to Jon at archivist@gchsitory.org

The Wreck of the Swallow, Part II
By Jonathan Palmer, Greene County Historian

(In last week's column the steamboat *SWALLOW* struck a rock and sank at Athens, New York)

Confusion dominated in all quarters from the moment the *SWALLOW* ran aground and sank. In the common custom of the time no clear accounting of the total number of passengers was ever taken, so it remained (and still remains) uncertain what the exact death toll was. Newspapers throughout the valley began publishing accounts within a day of the sinking, and it was claimed by some that upwards of forty persons died, though only thirteen bodies and one missing child could be identified by the end of the month. The hour of the sinking, the subsequent destruction of the aft staterooms by river currents, and the removal of survivors by the *ROCHESTER* and *EXPRESS* as well as good samaritans in Athens meant it was unclear for a time exactly who survived and where they ended up.

Conflicting stories as to the circumstances that precipitated the disaster filled newspapers in the ensuing weeks. These ranged from inclement weather, to racing on the part of the steamboats running that night, and even simple base negligence by the pilot and captain. A select committee charged with investigating the disaster on behalf of the New York State Senate began collecting salient facts within days of the sinking, including detailed measurements of the situation of the wreck and its relationship with the shoreline.

Pilot William Burnett gave testimony certain to cast himself in a prudent light, stating that after coming past Four Mile Point he slowed the *SWALLOW* to approximately seven miles per hour and proceeded with caution. This testimony conflicted with his additional assertions that he had fine visibility and knew his position relative to the Athens shoreline moments before the collision. Ultimately he blamed a strong crosswind for blowing the *SWALLOW* off course within about six hundred feet of the rock. The written reply of the select committee, after introducing the pilot's narrative, read thus:

"The committee cannot reconcile this story with the facts."

The select committee chalked up Burnett's testimony as predominantly nonsense, and rightly so. The *SWALLOW* covered the roughly 27 miles from Albany in two hours. Simple arithmetic gives us an average of almost fourteen miles per hour being necessary to accomplish that. Accounting for the points in the journey when the pilot gave an account of his speed as being half that or less (including the departure from Albany and his oddly prudent pass through the Athens channel) this means the *SWALLOW* would have had to exceed its top speed elsewhere at other dangerous points in the channel coming south from Albany.

That Burnett's testimony was riddled with falsehoods is corroborated by several facts uncovered by the select committee. The absurd position of the wreck, which couldn't have arrived so high upon the rock unless it had been moving at a tremendous rate, illustrated clearly the speed and force of the impact. Some passengers submitted a subsequent resolution defending the pilot's testimony, but others found fault in it and the question remains whether passengers enjoying the evening in comfortable aft staterooms could have had a clear sense of the Ship's speed in the dark.

Likewise, the committee found it irregular that any pilot would have decided to slow their vessel at a position where the channel became so clear and defined. It was in fact highly unusual among pilots to slow their speed at Athens and the report elaborates on this point at length. Indeed, even Burnett said he could see his location well despite the weather. Lastly, none except the pilot claimed to have observed any wind that could have acted with such force to cast the *SWALLOW* off course in such a short distance.

The *SWALLOW* came to rest upon the rock more or less at coordinates 42.263750, -73.804724. This location is now part of the shoreline at Athens situated immediately north of the the Village's sewage treatment plant. Where it had once been known by several names depending on the source, the sinking thereafter earned the island the moniker "Swallow Rock." The rock endured at least into the 1870s, at which point encroaching fill for an ice house finally covered it up, but local writers were able to refer to the location with certainty as late as the 1940s.

This is not to say that the sinking of the *SWALLOW* didn't endure in collective memory. Generations of Athenians were regaled by tales of the disaster, and debate as to the causes of the wreck have captured the imaginations of countless writers and historians. In a way this was the only lasting result of the tragedy. The wreck of the *SWALLOW* was removed and hauled away about a month after the sinking - its timbers famously salvaged for a house in Valatie, the running gear repurposed, and its dead buried. William Burnett was put on trial for manslaughter but acquitted, and the night boats kept running as before.

The select committee's report was submitted to the senate at the end of April while salvage operations were underway at Athens. It conveyed the nascent awareness of a nation becoming increasingly sensitive to the mounting evidence of an industry running roughshod over the best interests of the traveling public. There was undoubtedly some appeal in a slow boat where passengers survived over a fast one which perpetrated the occasional massacre, and it didn't take men of vision to see that regulation must reign where decency would not.

In calling for new safety regulations, the committee members included in their conclusions a passage from Emer de Vattel's *The Law of Nations*: "If a nation is obliged to preserve itself, it is no less obliged carefully to preserve all its members." It would take almost a decade and two more horrifying accidents on board the *HENRY CLAY* and the *REINDEED* (standouts in a slew of more minor incidents) to bring about the

regulation necessary to improve the safety of steam transportation on the Hudson River.

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

HISTORIAN'S LETTER [No. 2] 2022-07-01

Hello all!

This email list is a long overdue project of mine, and it was amazing to see how many friends, acquaintances, and fellow history aficionados signed up right away! This isn't going to be a groundbreaking or especially insightful history newsletter (and I can't promise you will get these with any regularity), but I hope it will serve as a nice way to be in touch outside of social media and the articles I write.

Recent Goings-on:

This past Wednesday I held an impromptu and surprisingly **well-attended cemetery tour** in the Catskill Village Cemetery on Thompson Street. This cemetery dates to 1811 and is perfectly representative of the earliest trends in the development of non-denominational rural and municipal cemeteries in the United States. I won't get into details, but lots of fascinating historical figures have "gone to [the narrow house](#)" here. Charles Beach and Thomas Cole are of course highlights, but [Uncle Sam's brother](#) (no kidding!), statesmen, artists, jurists, soldiers, and laborers also rest here having lived equally fascinating and consequential lives.

The Village Cemetery is in need of some TLC (like all older cemeteries typically are). Interest is always expressed by tour attendees concerning **cleaning and maintaining older stones**, and I've linked some resources so you can read up on best practices. If you'd like to get some hands-on experience **there will be a gravestone cleaning and maintenance program held in Palenville on July 9 from 9-11** where you can see some best practices in action and learn from some friends of mine who are dedicated historians and preservationists. Details are at the bottom of this email.

To quote a gravestone preservation expert "there is no good samaritan law when it comes to preservation." Meaning that the burden is on you to read up on best practices, seek permission, and be responsible about your technique. You might find a cleaner that does a great job, but most products and techniques commonly used invariably do more harm than good. Cleaning a stone is pointless if it speeds up the degradation of the stone's surface. Well-intentioned but accidental destruction of a piece of cultural heritage does nobody any favors. **The stone cleaning product recommended by the National Park Service is D/2 Biologic Solution.** A comprehensive five year study led to this being the choice product used at National Cemeteries. If you are going to clean, use the recommended product. **Bad alternatives include:** household soaps and solvents, bleach, wire brushes, and the like. You might have heard these are ok in certain circumstances, but this is not the case!

Some resources about graveyards and stone maintenance:

- A good book about graveyards in America called "The Last Great Necessity": <https://www.amazon.com/Last-Great-Necessity-Cemeteries-Landscape/dp/0801851289>
- Preservation instructions and supplies (including D/2): <https://atlaspreservation.com/>
- Recommendations on stone evaluation and technique from the National Park Service: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/cemetery-preservation-course-cleaning-grave-markers.htm>
- NPS Cleaning Guidelines: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/best-practice-recommendations-for-cleaning-government-issued-headstones.htm>
- NPS Publication on gravestones: <https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/preservedocs/preservation-briefs/48Preserve-Brief-GraveMarkers.pdf>
- A study by the NPS testing gravestone cleaners: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/comparative-study-of-commercially-available-cleaners-for-use-on-federally-issued-headstones.htm>

Back to the land of the living now! Here are some upcoming events:

Mike Kudish is doing a book signing for his latest revision of his authoritative history of the Catskills aptly titled "The Catskill Forest: A History". The event is being held at 72 Main Street, Andes, NY from 4:30-6:30 **on Tuesday July 12**. Info can be found by calling 347-262-4187 or by emailing biz@diamondhollowbooks.com
I sleep with a copy of this book by my bed and it makes me smarter just being near it. If you drive out to Andes you might even catch a glimpse of some ghosts of the Anti-Rent Wars while you're visiting.

A flyer is attached to this email detailing the Palenville Cemetery Preservation event to be held on July 9 in the Palenville Cemetery. A follow-up event the next weekend will let people hear some of the history of Palenville through the lives of the folks buried in that same cemetery

The Mountain Top Historical Society's Annual Meeting is on July 9 starting at 10am. Their upcoming events can be found online here: <https://www.mths.org/events.html> (I'm looking forward to their August 14th lecture)

The Greene County Historical Society is having **a concert at the Bronck Museum** titled "Songs of the Sixties" performed by Lex Grey and the Urban Pioneers on Saturday, July 10, and 1:30pm. Details here: <https://mailchi.mp/af7f2d5174dc/gchs-annual-meeting-on-may-8903581?e=8d461ca493>

If you have any questions or know about any upcoming events please drop me a line! Advance notice and flyers for history events are always appreciated.

Have a happy Fourth!

Jonathan Palmer | Greene County Historian

HISTORIAN'S LETTER [No. 2] 2022-07-22

Hello all!

Welcome to those who have joined this email list since it was announced in the local papers! This is the second email I've sent out, so for those who missed letter number 1 I'll include some of the salient points as an attachment at the end of this email. It was about graveyards but there were a handful of event notices that have come and gone already, making much of the letter out of date.

Catskill's Daguerreotype Dynasty

In the papers this week (Daily Mail, Windham Weekly/Mountain Eagle, and Porcupine Soup) an article has already appeared or will soon be published concerning the Van Loan family daguerreotypists originally from Catskill who were early innovators in the world of photography.

For those who keep up with me personally you're probably aware I'm a bit of a camera dork and photography hobbyist, so it should come as no surprise that I get drawn into photography history topics with some regularity. While this is certainly a little self-serving (who doesn't want to mix a bit of fun with their work?) it is also not a stretch to say that we live in a visuals-oriented culture. In light of that, taking time to examine the origins and roots of one of our most dominant media forms seems like a pretty good idea.

I won't elaborate on the content of the article because it should be freely available online by Saturday if you don't already subscribe to a local paper, but I will **explain how Jeremiah Gurney put me on the trail of the Van Loans**.

Several weeks ago Ted Hilscher (New Baltimore Town Historian) and I received an email from Civil War Historian Seward Osborne asking if we were aware of a record proving that Jeremiah Gurney was in fact buried at New Baltimore's historic Stanton Hill Cemetery. I didn't know who Gurney was, but after some reading it turns out he was one of the most successful photographers of the 19th century. Gurney was more financially successful than even Matthew Brady, won a prestigious award from one of the most important photography supply and distribution companies in the United States, and holds the incredible distinction [of being the only photographer to take a picture of Abraham Lincoln lying in state](#) following his assassination in 1865. The idea that this guy could be buried in Greene County was too cool to pass up digging into further.

After considerable digging (except at Stanton Hill itself) the best Ted and I can ascertain is that Gurney is *probably* buried in Stanton Hill. He was born to a Quaker family in New Baltimore and went to New York City as a young man to learn the Jeweler's trade. Transitioning to photography when that profession was newly introduced, Gurney quickly became one of New York City's premier daguerreotypists. He and his son remained in the trade into the 1880s, and Gurney himself is listed in papers of the time as dying in Coxsackie probably at the home of one of his many local relatives in 1895.

His passing, like that of many photography pioneers, received little attention. A fieldstone slab with a crude “J G” next to the stones of Gurney’s parents is the only contextual clue available that he was probably interred in Stanton Hill after passing in the next town south. No other records seem to survive (as of this letter) stating unequivocally that he was buried where we suspect. I’ve attached a photo of the stone in question to this email.

The search of course revealed some other excellent resources useful for uncovering stories of the earliest photographers in the United States. [The Daguerreian Society](#) maintains a small database of resources about the pioneer generation of photographers active in this country, including transcribed sources like one I viewed from the 1880s that described Alexander Wolcott’s disposition of his studio in New York to a “Mr. Van Loan” in the early 1840s. Officially sidetracked, I dove deeper and confirmed my suspicion that this Mr. Van Loan was indeed Matthew Dies Van Loan of Catskill, father of Walton Van Loan (of Van Loan’s Catskill Mountain Guide) who took over the daguerreotype studio of Alexander Wolcott. Wolcott himself was one of the first photographers to explore the use of the daguerreotype process for portraiture. That is “dang cool” stuff.

Matthew Dies Van Loan was married twice. The first marriage to Eliza Penfield produced a son who became a daguerreotypist in Philadelphia and died in Cairo, NY in 1900. Matthew’s second marriage was to Julia Thomson, daughter of James H. Thomson and niece of John A. Thomson and Thomas Thomson who were the builders of Cedar Grove at Catskill and uncles to Thomas Cole’s wife Maria Bartow. This would have made Van Loan and Cole cousins by marriage, though I eagerly anticipate the publication of Sylvia Hasenkopf’s transcriptions of Thomas Cole’s letters to see if any light is shed on Cole and Van Loan’s association (if they had one).

Some Upcoming Events:

Dedication of the Lexington Commemorative Brick Garden in memory of late Lexington Town Historian Karen Deeter will be held behind the Lexington Pavilion at 3542 Route 42, Lexington, NY on August 6 at 1pm. Many esteemed colleagues in local heritage will be in attendance with Lexington Town Historian (and event organizer extraordinaire) Mary Palazzolo and Deputy Historian (and volunteer extraordinaire) Chris Dwon to celebrate Karen Deeter’s life and work.

Tours of the Hudson-Athens Lighthouse are ongoing! Catch the boat from Athens on the following Saturdays: August 13, September 10, and October 8 between at 10, 11:30, or 1. Catch the boat from Hudson on August 27, September 24, and October 22 at 10, 11:30, or 1.

The Bronck Museum is hosting their **celebrated “By the Light of the Silvery Moon” event at 7PM on August 13** on the campus of the Bronck Museum at 90 County Route 42, Coxsackie, NY. Curator Shelby Mattice is pleased to welcome visitors for a festive evening of rural hospitality from America’s past. Enjoy the music of a strolling fiddle

player, wonderful refreshments, and hear the strange stories and tales inspired by the elusive magic of the full moon. Save the date and come enjoy the simple pleasures of nightlife in times gone by. Book your seat in advance by calling 518-731-6490 or by email to curator@gchistory.org

The Mountain Top Historical Society is hosting **a talk by Dr. Gary Lelonek on the history of Tannersville's deeply rooted and influential Jewish community on August 14 at 2PM** in the Ulster and Delaware Train Station located on the Society's campus at 5132 Route 23 A, Haines Falls, New York. Dr. Lelonek's book on the topic is a must-read, and his talk should prove equally informative!

Attachments:

Historian's letter no. 1

Photo of possible grave of Jeremiah Gurney at Stanton Hill Cemetery

Hope everyone stays cool on this very hot weekend!

Jonathan Palmer | Greene County Historian

HISTORIAN'S LETTER [No. 3] 2022-09-06

Hello all!

First, some upcoming events:

- My last office hours at Catskill Point will be this Wednesday, September 7th from 5:30 to 7:30. If you have missed previous office hours and are unable to drop by this Wednesday evening do not be alarmed! I hope to arrange similar Winter office hours beginning in November at different locations. When I know those dates I'll pass them along.
- **This Saturday, September 10th I will be giving a talk** on "Slavery at the Willows" on the invitation of the Greene Land Trust. The event will be held at The Willows at Brandow Point, 480 Route 385, Athens, NY 12015. The event is free but requires advance registration through this link: <https://greenelandtrust.org/september-10-2022-history-of-slavery-at-the-willows/>
- On **Thursday, September 15**, the Greene County Historical Society is pleased to welcome back celebrated speaker Ron Gabriele offering his program "War Dogs." Mr. Gabriele will examine the history of dogs on the battlefield, the roles that dogs play in today's American military, the similarities between the military dog and the police dog and finally the role of America's dogs in World War I and II, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan wars. This event will be held in the Society's Vedder Research Library at 90 County Route 42, Coxsackie, NY 12051.
- On **Saturday, September 17th** the Mountain Top Historical Society hosts their popular annual Postcard Show from 10:00 to 3:00 with an entrance fee of \$3.00 to benefit the work of the Society. The event will be held in the Society's historic Ulster and Delaware Train Station, located at the rear of their campus near the top of the Clove at 5132 Rt. 23A in Haines Falls.
- On **Sunday, September 18th** the Greene County Historical Society is hosting a lecture by Society President Bob Hallock titled "How the Queen's Road became the King's Road" examining the history of this important colonial road system. The event will be held on the Society's Campus at 90 County Route 42, Coxsackie, NY 12051.

Now, those of you who read my weekly articles are probably wondering two things: why did you miss all those weeks in August, and what on earth does this Pelatiah Fitch fellow have to do with Greene County?!

It's the Summer, and I'll have to beg everyone's indulgence for missing a few article deadlines. As for Mr. Fitch, frankly the story of his grievously misplaced sloop

the *HIRAM* has everything to do with Greene County even though it also has a lot to do with Jamaica, Haiti, the French, and the English.

For those who have no idea what I'm talking about, here is a link to the article, read it and then come back to this email: <https://porcupinesoup.com/pelatiah-fitch-and-the-quasi-war> (Part two will be out this week)

Assuming you are now fully versed in the nuances of the [Quasi War](#), this brings us back to the ultimate question - what can we learn about Greene County from an event that happened in Haiti? For starters let me explain how I found out about Mr. Fitch. Our unfortunate shipless friend died in Athens dreaming of his long lost boat sometime in 1833. His estate was regrettably tied up in ongoing attempts by his family to seek restitution for a loss which may have totaled as much as \$6,000 - a considerable sum when adjusted for today's inflation.

As such, Fitch's granddaughter Sarah Shaw, also of Athens, was still pressing the case in the 1880s as one minor thread in the complex story of the [French Spoliation Claims](#). The spoliation claims are a patchwork of diplomatic wrangling, congressional hearings, court cases, and stacks of paper in disparate government archives so complicated it would make the Byzantines blush. It all had to do with attempts by the United States Government and private citizens to seek damages for ships taken as prizes during the Quasi War. The total amount of damages sought is often given as \$20,000,000.00 (!!) and I have no figure for the number of vessels which fell victim to French commerce raiding.

Anyway, Sarah Shaw fortunately kept a file of all of the various court cases her grandfather was engaged in. First, Fitch tried to get his boat back. When that failed he then tried to get someone to pay for it. These efforts alone resulted in some wild paperwork, including a report by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams in 1824 giving a summary and conclusions about whether or not Congress had a financial obligation to Fitch for his loss of the *HIRAM*. Mr. Adams did not find there was any obligation by Congress to pay Fitch at that time. Adams [was sort of elected president](#) within a year of that report, probably much to Fitch's dismay.

This all again came to a head when the Federal government began reviewing spoliation claims again in the mid 1880s, many of which remained unresolved eighty years after the Quasi War. Shaw and County Surrogate John Sanderson, a judge from Athens, decided that it was time to press their case yet again. In this effort they were more or less successful, finally allowing the family to resolve Pelatiah Fitch's estate over a century after the *HIRAM* was taken and more than seventy years after Fitch's death. Fortunately, that meant all of the various papers and court cases concerning the *HIRAM* went into Mr. Fitch's files of estate documents - so rather than this story being lost and scattered among various federal and state archives we got more or less the entire thing sitting on a shelf in three fat folders waiting for someone to come along and browse through it.

So, it turns out the only concise way to know this whole story is to go to the files of the Greene County Surrogate's Court.

As to other things this story sheds light on: I was unaware that sloops built in the Hudson Valley ranged so far and wide in their trade. That we have such good documentation about a sloop, its quality and cost, and the type of business it engaged in is really a boon for contextualizing this important moment in our regional and economic history. Here we have a vessel of a largely vernacular design suited to the Hudson River making voyages to the Caribbean through investment by small trading firms.

Oddly, neither Fitch nor his partner Rufus Backus ever specified what the *HIRAM*'s cargo was in any of their court proceedings or summaries of the loss. I can give no reason or account for this, only speculations. That an Athens businessman would be sending a vessel to Jamaica in the late 1790s is in and of itself a remarkable revelation. There was no business going on in the 1790s in Jamaica that wasn't directly tied to the [particularly brutal form of slavery practiced on the island's sugar plantations](#). It is very probable that the *HIRAM*, like many ships from the northeast bound for Jamaica, was carrying foodstuffs or livestock to the island - as Jamaica's arable land was primarily devoted to growing sugar cane rather than food to sustain the enslaved.

In this way the saga of the *HIRAM* allows us both a window into a complex moment in our national history as well as clues about the nature of our forebears in this place. To top it all off I'm always in for a good sea story.

Drop a line with any questions, and thanks for reading!

Jonathan Palmer | Greene County Historian

HISTORIAN'S LETTER [No. 4] 2022-10-12

Hello all!

Hope this finds everyone well as we approach the middle of October. This letter serves to convey just a few announcements and cover some housekeeping.

This Saturday, October 15th, is going to be a busy one! I am assisting with tours that day of both the Coxsackie Village Cemetery and Mount Hope Cemetery in Athens. These tours are of two different flavors: the afternoon tours in Coxsackie are more of a history walk and talk examining this early community burial ground, while the Athens tours in the evening are by lantern-light and attendees will get to meet and talk with four figures from Athens' past who are interred at Mount Hope. Details are as follows:

Tours of Coxsackie Village Cemetery will occur at 1:00, 2:00, and 3:00 on the 15th at the front gate of the old cemetery at 168-126, NY-385, Coxsackie, NY 12051. Tours are capped at roughly 20/per tour and tickets are \$10 apiece to benefit the restoration of the cemetery. You may call the following numbers to reserve a ticket. (518) 731-9509 (518) 320-8545 or (518) 817-8771

Tours of Mount Hope Cemetery occur later that evening at 6:30, 7:00, and 7:30 on the 15th. Tickets will be available for \$10 at the door, but reservations are strongly suggested by calling 518-610-5105 or 518-821-7177. Mount Hope Cemetery is the graveyard on the right side of the road as you crest the hill on Market Street in Athens. Proceeds benefit the maintenance of this historic burial ground.

Now, you may have noticed that I have written no new articles in the papers since the conclusion of the saga of Pelatiah Fitch. This pause was for a personal absence while Heather and I celebrated our wedding on October 1. There is a rumor that the ceremony occurred in a graveyard - this is not true, though as far as rumors go I think this particular one is excellent. Next week we should be back to our regularly scheduled programming.

As always, questions and comments are welcome.

Jonathan Palmer | Greene County Historian

HISTORIAN'S LETTER [No. 5] 2022-12-2

Hello all!

With any luck this letter finds everyone overstuffed and happy after the Thanksgiving holiday. It has been over a month since my last Historian's Letter, and much has transpired in that time. First off, **congratulations must be given** to the volunteers at Coxsackie's historic Mansion Street Cemetery and the board of Mount Hope Cemetery in Athens for the successful fundraisers they held at the end of October. I am uncertain about Coxsackie's figures, but **Mount Hope managed to secure something to the tune of \$1500 in proceeds** to be put towards maintenance and restoration work in that historic graveyard. I was happy to put in a long day's work giving tours at both events, though at Mount Hope many hands made light work and **the stars were the volunteers** who portrayed historic characters from the Village's past - keeping over 120 attendees enthralled on their respective tours. **Demand is high for a repeat event next October.**

I was asked where I sourced materials to create the short biographies and talking points concerning the historic figures portrayed at both events, so what follows is a short list of some of the resources I usually start with, because folks didn't buy it when I said I made it all up. Go figure.

Beers' "History of Greene County, New York with Biographical Sketches of its Prominent Men" (1884) - This resource should be familiar to many of you already, because even after almost 140 years this volume remains an invaluable reference tool which is freely available online in several places. There's really no shortage of fascinating things within - from lists of civil servants and school districts to lengthy relations of exciting tales and community intrigue. Each town has its own chapter written by a local historian, my favorite being Henry Brace's chapter on "Old Catskill" which is well grounded and methodically researched but snarky and classist at the same time. You can find [each chapter as a text-recognized PDF](#) on the Vedder Research Library's website or browse a transcription of it on the next resource.

[Tracing Your Roots in Greene County](#) - Beginning around 2000 Sylvia Hasenkopf started compiling new inventories of the cemeteries of Greene County on a rootsweb site for the benefit of the interested public. Sourcing contributions from volunteers and supplementing it with loads of her own work, Tracing Your Roots quickly became an invaluable tool for literally anyone with interest in tracking down obscure local history topics. Within are transcriptions done by volunteers of important historical works and reference materials, as well as transcriptions of all sorts of random civil documents, lists, and collection inventories from places like the Durham Center Museum, the Vedder Research Library, the Greene County Surrogate's Court and the Greene County Clerk's office. The site looks very 1995 by today's standards, but the search bar works just fine and the table of contents is well worth a deep dive. It is nowhere near as bizarre or dated looking as the next resource.

Old Fulton Postcards - [This website is one wild ride](#). If you want to dig for obscure events, names, and topics in local newspapers there's no better place to go (although there are a slew of newspaper databases out there). This site is maintained by a good samaritan with a server and microfilm scanner in his basement. All searches need to be [composed using boolean operators](#), so brush up and read the help guide on the website before diving in.

Google Books - No kidding. Google Books has scanned millions of pages of textual resources held in special collections and archives across the world. If you are looking for an individual who was once involved in local or regional government (just as an example) chances are there is a committee proceeding, special report, or annual report in which that person appears. I've had loads of success on both Google Books and [Google Patents](#) finding previously hard-to-locate materials of all kinds. I accidentally found a relative once because he wrote a letter to a beekeeping society in Chicago asking about a problem with his hives in Athens in the 1880s. The journal in which his letter appeared was digitized on Google Books. Just for fun [Here's the Laws of New York for 1813](#).

The Vedder Library - Coming from me this recommendation is a little obvious, but over the last five years I've grown more and more to respect the sometimes quirky but always insightful cataloging (that is to say, five or six catalogs) that describe some of the hardest to find and most obscure local primary source materials available. For example the earliest newspapers from Greene County (beginning in 1792) are in the Vedder and I consult them regularly for various research projects. We also have almost any local history publication you can think of in print, plus all the local history publications you didn't think of, and they're all available to browse on site in the reading room. [You can book a visit here](#).

Naturally, every research topic (and every character profile for a cemetery tour) will lead you down unforeseen avenues and take you to unexpected sources, but all of the resources listed above are good places to start!

As for other news, I really fell down the rabbit hole in late October and November tracking down the story of the "**Fourteen Irish Colleens of Ashland**." For those that don't know the story, you can find the 2600 word article on the topic [at this link](#) if you didn't already read it in three parts through the local papers. This Wednesday an interview I did with the one and only Mike Ryan will be airing on WRIP 97.9 in which we spend about fifteen minutes talking about the Colleens and Saint Joseph's Chapel. I don't know the time it airs yet but will include a copy of the audio in my next letter.

For those who don't already have a busy December schedule this is a reminder that the Hudson-Athens Lighthouse and the Hudson River Ice Yacht Club will both be in attendance at this year's **Winter Walk in Hudson** on December 3. I will also be giving a

cemetery tour in Athens for the **Athens Victorian Stroll** the following weekend on December 10. A schedule of the strolls can be found at these links:

<https://hudsonhall.org/event/winter-walk-25th-anniversary/>

<https://athensculturalcenter.org/victorian-stroll>

Lastly, a reminder! It is time to make sure your memberships are renewed with your local historical societies and museums for 2023! Your memberships support so much important work being done across the County. If you don't know the heritage organizations working near where you live just email me and we can figure it out.

As always, drop a line with any questions or comments whenever you like. I'd be happy to hear from you.

Happy Holidays,

Jonathan Palmer | Greene County Historian