

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

November 2008, Issue

Calendar / Share Session

A pleasantly cool November evening, about 40°, greeted the fifteen of us who came out for the last GLHG meeting of the year: Bob & Marie Shaw, Ron Golden, Allyn Shaw, Harriett Rasmussen, Larry & Dot Hesel, Phyllis Beechert, Jeannette Rose, Dave & Harriet Gumpert, Walter Ingalls, David & Judy Rundell, and Don Teator.

The major attraction was the 2009 calendar. Even though it was available last month, we took our time this month to pause and savor, re-read, add more information, tell stories, remember, and all other things we do at our meetings.

The first part was a **THANK YOU** to Jeannette Rose and Linda Berger for sponsoring this calendar in memory of their parents. The connection to the boarding house era, as well as memorializing the efforts of one's parents, was a worthy strand for our local history calendar. Without your backing, Jeannette and Linda, this calendar would not have been done, and we feel your pride in the family connections with Greenville's local history.

For those who have not yet bought a calendar, the calendar features past fifteen covers of the calendar, a 1960 aerial of Greenville, the corner

hotel where the Pioneer now stands, the Corner Restaurant being razed, Main Street Garage and the auxiliary building just before Stewart's arrival, Sutton's blacksmith shop in Freehold, the Alberta Lodge, a down-in-the-dumps Miracle Mile sign, Burdette Griffin plowing the back fields, Merritt and Ruth Elliott out on a carriage ride, eight Sunday afternoon target hunters, the Greenville Free Academy's Class of 1929, and, of course, the Singer family on the inside back cover pages.

Although I am not the most impartial reviewer, I believe the quality and range of topics and photos of this 2009 calendar set a standard for the next calendar. Although the calendar takes dozens of hours of work, the final result is a justification of our efforts.

The calendar is available at the library and at Bryant's. If you frequent either place, please take time to thank the appropriate person for allowing us to publicize our calendar. In addition, I can be contacted to arrange a mail order.

Looking ahead, I have intentions of starting the 2010 calendar during the winter. If you recall any worthy photo we have not yet used, and think it a good candidate for the next calendar, let me know.

The production of the 2010 calendar hinges on finding a sponsor. In the cold light of finances, the calendar costs about \$1400, and a sponsor could underwrite most, if not all, of the costs. Feel free to "persuade" a person, family, business, or other good-hearted group to consider this undertaking, or/and to call me for more information.

Reminder: The calendar depends on good photos and good research. I am always looking for someone's photo albums that we have not discovered yet. Let me know if you have a lead.

We talked about possible recognitions of living community members, deceased members, and preservation efforts. Thank you for the ideas that we generated this evening; if you have others, contact me (for the tech-savvy: don@dteator.com).

Harriett summarized her latest venture—reading a 1910 diary of a Ed Lounsbury, who seems to live in the Durham and Oak Hill area. Ed's daughter Anna married a Floyd Grant. If you know anything about this family, let Harriett know.

Harriett also had communication from Arlene Taylor Steadman, great-granddaughter of R.E. Taylor, who has been a continual thread of our meetings over the past dozen years. Arlene was thanking Harriett for all her diary efforts but was also letting Harriett know that Arlene's father, Wayne, has died. (Wayne was the son of Harry Taylor who was RE's son.)

Another brief note: I had recent communication with June Clark, who says hello from NYC, and from Rosemary Lambert, who also says hello and wishes she could attend meetings like she used to.

So, 2008 winds down. I hope Thanksgiving Day lived up to its name for you and your family. Winter approaches (some of you will declare it is here already!) and with it, perhaps, we can keep local history in mind and be ready to share something next year. The annual report will be out in mid-winter.

Also reproduced is a recent Daily Mail piece that makes for Halloween-time reading, as is a Prattsville area clipping.

Local web sites to look over:

Comprehensive Plan / Zoning Revision:

www.greenvillecommunityplan.org

Community Partners:

www.communitypartnersofgreenville.org

Town of Greenville:

www.mygreenville.com

Mountain View Brasserie:

www.mountainviewbrasserie.com

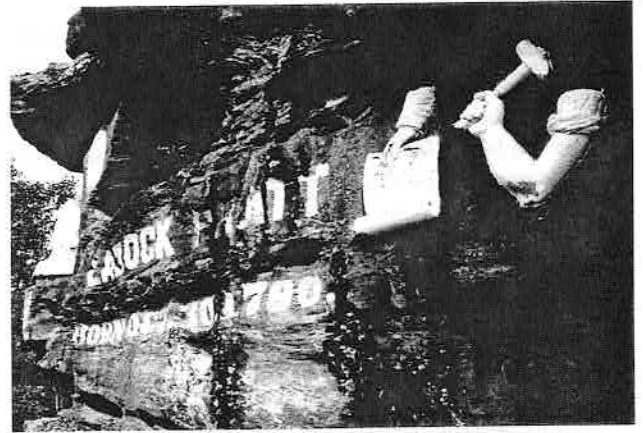
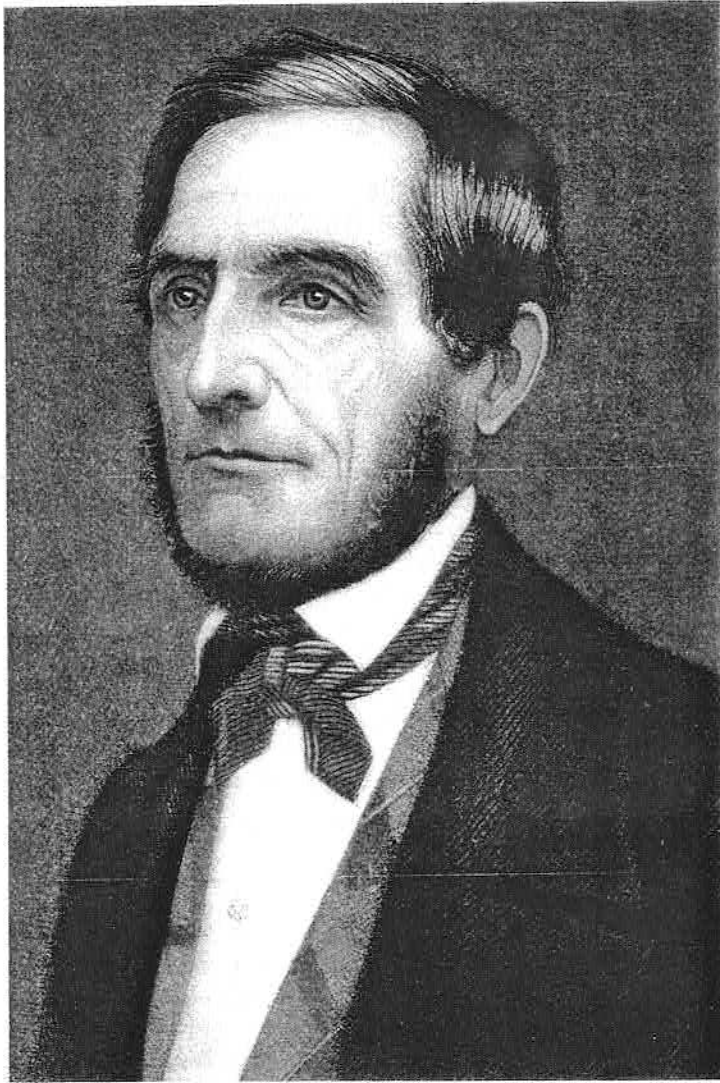
Freehold House:

freeholdhouse.com

—Any others? Email me the links.

Take care,





At left: Zadock Pratt in his prime. This bas-relief carving of a bare arm on a cliffside near Prattsville (above) symbolizes Pratt's belief that he succeeded by "hard knocks." Housed in the philanthropist's former home, the Pratt Museum (below) showcases the important events in Pratt's life



ENGRAVING COURTESY OF CATSKILL PUBLIC LIBRARY; PHOTOGRAPHS BY TEREZ M. LIMER (TOP), VINCENT J. MONTABANO (BOTTOM)

A King of the Catskills

Zadock Pratt was a shrewd businessman, a military officer, a congressman, a champion of the poor, and the founder of charming Prattsville. And then there are those rocks
By Richard Buttlar

If you owned a pair of shoes in 19th-century America, chances are they came via the Catskills. The bark of the mountains' hemlocks provided a seemingly inexhaustible supply of tannin, needed to turn cowhide into leather. The price for all that footwear was steep: acre upon acre of breathtaking forests fell to the woodsman's axe. To halt this onslaught, voters approved the 1894 "Forever Wild" amendment to the state constitution, creating the Catskill Forest Preserve.

It should come as no surprise that the tanlords — the men who pocketed the profits from all that chopping — today enjoy reputations ranging from infamy to utter obscurity. Except for Zadock Pratt. Take it from Alf Evers, that great chronicler of the mountains: "Pratt slew more hemlock trees...; his tannery stank just as much as any other; the debris his men left on mountainsides gave rise to as many destructive forest fires — yet he is remembered with affection and as a human being."

Why?

Pratt had a long way to go to become one of the Catskills' leg-

endary figures. Coming from a family of industrious New Englanders, he learned the tanning trade from his father, Zadock Senior, who cobbled shoes and farmed on the side to make ends meet. Young Zadock added to the family coffers by picking huckleberries. In 1801, the Pratts moved from Rensselaer County to Jewett, Greene County, where the 11-year-old helped his father in his new tannery, worked in the fields, and sewed leather mittens.

Pratt's formal schooling was rudimentary at best, but he learned to read and write and add and subtract — essentials for succeeding in business in those days. More important, however, were the lessons he gleaned from his parents. "His father imbued him with a deep sense of patriotism, honesty, and devotion to duty. His mother instilled him with the principles of her Christian faith and of ethical duty and responsibility," states one biographical account. Above all else, Pratt's steadfast adherence to these ideals is what set him apart from his fellow tanlords.

Pratt served a one-year apprenticeship with a saddle maker, then went into business on his own, making harnesses. Within a couple of years, the hardworking young man had saved up enough money to open a general store. To increase future savings, he slept beneath the counter, avoiding room rent. In 1814, shopkeeping took a back seat to serving his country, as Pratt enlisted to fight the British in the War of 1812. As a company steward in Brooklyn, he still managed to turn a tidy personal profit: He won the contract for supplying the army with 100,000 oars, crafted of ash from the Catskills.

When the war ended, Pratt continued his shrewd business practices. By 1824, his bank account bulging with \$14,000, he decided to become a big-time Catskills tanner — but where? At the reins of a one-horse wagon, he set off exploring. One day he pulled up in a hamlet on the mountains' western flank. It had everything he needed — an endless supply of water from the Schoharie Creek and Batavia Kill, and surrounding forests blanketed with hemlocks. After plunking down \$1,300 to purchase a sizeable tract of land, he assured his new neighbors that he planned "to live with them, not on them."

As his tannery took off, Pratt more than lived up to that promise. "While most tannery settlements in the Catskills were shantytowns where buildings were run up hastily with no hope that they would last longer than the time it would take to use up the neighboring hemlocks, Zadock Pratt made his town one in which the lowliest worker could take pride," states Evers.

In fact, Zadock Pratt was a civic dynamo. He funded construction of three new churches, a schoolhouse, and a number of small industries, including a woolens mill and furniture-making factories. He had the main street lined with shade trees and sidewalks, and provided attractive housing for his employees at modest cost. Considered one of America's first planned communities, the renamed Prattsville quickly earned the nickname "the gem of the Catskills." It's still a very pleasant village.

For his own residence, Pratt erected a grand home whose portico was supported by six tall columns. More than anything, this Mount Vernon in miniature, located on the town's main drag, signaled that Pratt intended to remain in town long after

the last of the hemlocks had vanished. (Today, it's the Zadock Pratt museum, which showcases Pratt's life.)

Pratt took special interest in the poor and struggling. At the bank he established in town, he provided loans based not on potential collateral, but the appearance of a man's face and especially his hands. Those who looked like they worked hard got money. It's said that once, when out in the woods, Pratt encountered a young man in desperate need of funds. Pratt's pockets were empty, so he picked up a flat stone and scratched on it a makeshift check. "Take that to my bank in Prattsville and they'll give you the money," he said. The check was cashed promptly.

Pratt also never stopped serving his country. He kept his hand in the young nation's military affairs, serving as an officer in the state militia. (Around Prattsville, he was known as "the Colonel.") He served two terms in Congress, and made good use of his four years in Washington. He proposed both a transcontinental railroad and establishment of the U.S. Bureau of Statistics, and in 1838 was instrumental in reducing the cost of postage from 25 cents to 5 cents. The only thing Pratt wasn't successful at was marriage. His first three wives died within a year or two of their weddings; his fourth wife divorced him. The

One of America's first planned communities, Prattsville earned the nickname "the gem of the Catskills"

fifth time down the aisle finally proved a charm: the 20-year-old bride wound up outliving her 70-year-old husband.

Pratt died in 1871, but he left a stunning visual reminder of his contributions to the region. Sometime in the 1840s an itinerant stone-cutter or sculptor passing through Prattsville asked the tanlord for a handout. Pratt refused to give him money outright, instead offering him a job — carving what would amount to the Valley's largest and most unusual memorial.

Located on a cliff just outside of town, this Mount Rushmore of the Catskills features huge bas-relief representations of everything from Pratt's tannery building and a hemlock to a horse (steeds were used to lug hemlocks from forest to tannery) and a bare arm wielding a hammer, meant to symbolize Pratt's belief that he succeeded by "hard knocks." There also is a memorial to Pratt's only son, George, who died of wounds suffered in the first Battle of Bull Run, during the Civil War.

The carvings are painted white, to stand out from the dull gray rock. And to make it easier for visitors making the uphill trek to the cliff, benches have been hewn out of the rock, providing comfortable way stations with pleasant views of the valley and creek below.

Even in death, Zadock Pratt is looking out for the people of Prattsville — and anyone else who comes to visit. ♦

Zadock Pratt Museum Closed for the season, the museum will reopen in the spring. Call for further information. ▶ Prattsville. 518-299-3395.

Ghost

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families had moved in and out of the home in the last decade.

"This surely is a gem here in Catskill," the realtor told them. They knew it was, and didn't ask questions.

They bought it in the summer, and all was quiet as they settled in. None of the night terrors had invaded their lives yet. Then the first spring came, and so did the first dreams of *her*.

They were only afterthoughts in the beginning, a fleeting glimpse of a dull gray figure. Then the dreams became more vivid as the month of April wore on. Elizabeth would wake in the morning confused and scared. The figure had slowly become brighter, outlined brilliantly in a sort of celestial aura. Each night the dreams became more vibrant, more lasting, revealing more of the tale, as it were.

She had been stirred awake by the nightmares one evening, to the consolation of Richard at her bedside. She told him about what she saw.

"It was terrible," she crooned with tears welling up in her baggy eyes. "The girl, she... she was killed. She was murdered ... I saw a horse. It had flames in its eyes. It was so bright, Richard. It was restless, it wouldn't be still. Then the girl ... she was bound by her wrists behind it. Oh god."

Richard held her tightly as she recounted her dreams. His eyes were closed as he listened.

"Then it just took off. The horse just took off. She couldn't run fast enough to keep up ... she fell to the ground. She couldn't stop it. The horse's mane was fire, the tail fire, her hands were burning ... She didn't make it. She was dragged to death. In front of our house."

She began to sob uncontrollably that night, and all Richard could do was hold her.

Now it was here, it was spring again. The terrors had returned. Elizabeth was tired every day. She couldn't sleep, it was too traumatic for her.

She gardened to relax her mind, and in a way her new life to the soil rejuvenated her own spirit.

With a half dozen new marigolds, and snapdragons, she had done enough for one afternoon. The sun was making it's decent toward the horizon and she got a bit a lump in her throat at the thought of night. There was an especially uncomfortable vibe in the air, something that she hadn't felt before.

"Richard, honey," she called as he pulled off her soiled gloves. "Want to go out tonight?"

"Sure, hon," he answered from the front porch. "What are you in the mood for tonight?"

"Whatever. I just want to try something new tonight," she said it knowing she had an ulterior motive. She just had a bad feeling, she needed to get away.

The couple spent the rest of the afternoon getting ready for their night out. They made reservations at a swanky Italian joint in downtown Albany, and spent their evening there wining and dining the night away. And for a moment, Elizabeth forgot about ... *her*.

The journey home was full of laughter and conversation on the start, then winding down to afford Elizabeth the luxury of some comforting shuteye. The car seemed to be swallowed by the blackness of the countryside, the moon's light eclipsed by the shadow of the Earth.

As the car rolled slowly into the gravel drive of their home, almost at the instant it broke through the threshold of the drive Elizabeth sprang awake, screaming. Richard cringed and instinctually screeched the sedan to a halt. "Liz?!"

The door flung open and she jolted from the car, screaming hysterically. She sprinted down the drive, in a fury. Richard flew from the car after her.

"Wait, Liz! Where are you going? Stop!"

Elizabeth didn't respond, couldn't respond. She just kept screaming, running through the night on usually busy thoroughfare in front of their home. It seemed like she was possessed. She held her hands clasped high above her head as she ran, screaming.

"Liiizzz!!!" Richard yelled as he followed her. She could always run faster than him, and he knew it. She was usually the one pacing herself when they ran together in the morning. Her screams prompted nearby lights to flick on, neighbors taking notice.

"Liizzz!!! Noooo!" Richard yelled as he saw headlights coming around the bend.

There wasn't much time to react. She didn't have much time, maybe she didn't want to react. The truck came suddenly. The screaming carried through the night air, dominated soon by the screeches of 18 tires.

"Nooooooo!!!" Richard screamed as he ran toward her. But it was too late. The scream became a sharp screech, then ... silence.

Richard knelt down by her still, silent form. The screaming had stopped. Tears were streaming from Richard's eyes. She was mumbling something. Richard leaned in.

"Sh-she ... she was ... in so much ... pain," she intoned softly. "He killed her ... and her fingertips were on fire. ..."

"Don't worry baby, you're gonna be fine," Richard affirmed. Her body was mangled, she had been launched by the truck. She didn't seem to care. Maybe she couldn't bear the pain, maybe she had enough of *her*.

"No ... more ..." she said as her last breath exhaled.

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And her fingertips were on fire ... a ghastly tale of the ghost of Leeds

By Colin DeVries
Hudson-Catskill Newspapers

The following fictional tale is based on the true story of a servant girl, Anna Dorothea Swarts, who had allegedly been the victim of a homicide by prominent aristocrat William Salisbury. The case was dismissed by the court and, according to local legend, her spirit has been said to haunt the hamlet of Leeds where she was killed — waiting for her death to be avenged.

Guuhhhh! Elizabeth gasped as she sprung to life from her slumber, beads of

sweat reflecting what moonlight could. She had the dream again.

"Liz?" her husband Richard said, fluttering his dozy eyelids awake. "Did you see her again?"

He slinked forward to embrace her, she was shivering. At a loss for words she simply nuzzled into him, she needed his warmth now, his comfort. Her mind was wracking, the image of her imprinted in her thoughts.

It was Annie again, she thought, as her eyes squeezed shut. *Why won't she leave me be?* Every spring the nightmares would haunt her. Every night Elizabeth dreaded to fall

asleep, she dreaded being taken into back *her* world.

The warmth of a new season, sequestered for months, had finally made its way back for the spring. The ground was now ripe for planting a new garden, and Elizabeth jumped on the opportunity.

"Dick," she called, "can you bring over another bag of soil."

Her dark locks her were tied back as she bent down from her knees to dig her flowers new homes. Richard lumbered over with a new bag of soil so they could bring new life to their country plot in the quiet hamlet of Leeds.

Elizabeth and Richard Crowell lived in a splendid stone house of 18th century heritage, and thought they were the luckiest couple on the block. Their home was perfect, they thought. Why would anyone sell this home? It was perhaps one of the most historical structures in the neighborhood, and embodied the splendor of the rural community.

The couple was too eager to get settled into their first home to inquire to the realtor of the last owner. They weren't aware the house had been on the market for over three years, or that five new

Please see Ghost, page A12



Courtesy Harper's

The Leeds Stone Bridge, c. 1799.