

# Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

July 2009, Issue 193

Greenville Geology—Titus

Good almost mid-summer, to all,

A pleasant summer day's end welcomed GLHG and Dr. Titus to our July meeting. So many times, I have written about the wonders of air conditioning in July and August but it was not needed this evening.

Wow! I usually note those who attend but my head was going in too many directions to keep track of the 50-55 who came, making this meeting one of the fullest, if not the fullest, meetings in our twenty years. (The one room school house meeting was right up there, too.) We even dragged in fifteen chairs from the small community room.

**SPECIAL NOTE:** I will NOT be in town for our August meeting. Thus, unless someone wants to act as coordinator, or unless we move our meeting night, the August meeting is cancelled. Give me a call ASAP if you want to be leader for August. (Changing dates has caused too many problems in the past so that choice is probably not desirable.) Otherwise, we will have a share session on the second Monday of September.

Well, the buildup for Dr. Robert Titus, Senior Full Professor, Department Chair of Geology at Hartwick College, Oneonta, garnered the attention of many non-GLHGers. Although many of us did attend as usual, it was the surge of community members that swelled our final attendance.

The Geology of Greenville was the topic for the evening. Dr. Titus's (from hereon known

as Robert) publishing history includes three books as well as newspaper articles in Columbia, Ulster and Greene Counties. He writes regularly for the Kaatskill Life quarterly (since its start!) and, for the past quarter-year, also pens a weekly series (Thursday) in the Catskill Daily Mail.

Robert is known for his folksy storytelling, communicating what can be the very dry subject of rocks, strata, arcane ancient



plant and animal names, geologic forms and other nearly impossible verbiage. Instead, with the use of a PowerPoint, and with a direct connection with the audience, he took us on a tour of what may have happened in Greenville over the last millions (billions, also) of years. One of his main examples was the fault lines in the Catskill Creek, the lines usually lining up at 30-40 degrees west of south, proof that giant land masses butted up against each other and spread apart, much like what is causing the Himalaya Mountain Range.

After spending about a half-hour of the

ancient seas, plate tectonics, climate change, Gilboa petrified trees, and the Everest-like mountains that now are the Berkshires and Taconics, Robert approached the ice age. Stark evidence of the glacier's (or glaciers') passing is the dotting of drumlins along the Basic and Ten Mile Creeks. His main example was Carelas's Hill, the hill that one rides over, a half mile south of Greenville on Rt 32, on your way past Barbara's Lake (or, is it Carelas's Lake?), the drive-in, and the Mountain View Brasserie. He indicated that our drumlins are steeper on the north side and more gentle on the south side, which is typical of glacial action.

There was a lot more; anyone interested can either read his publishings, or email me for Robert's email address, if needed. A very appreciative thank you goes to Robert for educating this evening

I have included the very last two of Ray Beecher's Greene Gleanings that I had intended to use. Thanks for the memories, Ray.

Also included is information about historical markers and properties on the **county** register.

Another reminder: I am missing these GCS yearbooks: 1952, 1984, 1992, and 1993. Keep an eye out for me, thanks.

Here's my semi-annual reminder about subscriptions to this newsletter. If your envelope has an expiration date of Nov '09 or later, you are good until the next reminder. If earlier than Nov '09, you can renew by sending a check (or cash, if you trust the mail), made out to Don Teator, to 3979 Rt 67, Freehold, NY. The price is still \$5 for a year to cover postage and supplies. Multi-year subscriptions are still accepted.

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## Greene Gleanings

By **Raymond Beecher**  
Greene County Historian

To most locals except perhaps attorneys-at-law, "Freehold" is a proper noun and refers to a geographical area of the county. When spelled with a regular "F" it takes on an entirely different meaning, the manner in which title to real estate is held. The Columbia Encyclopedia has a very scholarly explanation traced back to feudalism in the Middle Ages.

With the English takeover of this Dutch colony, governor Nicolas was called upon by his superiors in London to provide information in order for them to gain a better understanding of their new colony. One, number three related to how title to land was held: "The Tenure of lands is derived from his R.H. (Duke of York) who gives and grants lands to planters as their freehold forever, they paying the customary rates and duties..." The take over also recognized Dutch claims for their land

holdings but required the issuance of new patents.

What started me on this was my studying the list of 28 male freeholder names which Gerret Van Schaick, High Sheriff of the City and County of Albany prepared by direction of the Court of Judicature held for the Duke of York's Province of New York on the 11th day of June 1720. Fortunately his list separates the surnames for "Coxhacky and Cats Kills," in a section apart from other Albany wards and geographical units. It is also to be noted that "Cats Kill" was used and not "the Grote Embocht" that early.

Like other colonial era lists the surname spellings of some names are confusing. Hotaling is down as "Hotlen" and Bronck as "Brunk" while the two Van Bergens end with "hen."

The other confusing point is trying to determine if the editor of these colonial documents when published a century or more later sought to correct the spelling of some

but not all. Van Loan has the "a" and not the double "o" as used by Jan Van Loon.

Handwritings can be at times difficult to read. The Vedder Library staff occasionally has need to ask one another about a surname spelling. My handwriting often confuses the typist at *The Daily Mail*.

The High Sheriff's list of 1720 is a challenge to local historian to compile related biographical information with Leonard Bronck and Samuel Van Veehten being two of the easy ones.

Neither should the short list of 28 names imply a low density of population in 1720 for some families were tenants and not freeholders in title.

A few columns ago I wrote

about the Helen Brown scrapbook gift to the Vedder and my attempt to determine the compiler. Tentatively I credit it to one Lucy Covenhoven of the township of Westerlo. Thanks to Harriet Rasmussen of Greenville we now have Lucy Covenhoven's genealogy information via Judy Rundell and can now catalogue the scrapbook as Lucy Covenhoven's work. Thank you Harriet R.! And I also have a "thank you" for the man at the blood analysis clinic at Jefferson Heights in September who came up to me from across the small waiting room and mentioned reading my Sunday columns. As I humorously say, "It keeps me out of mischief when I am writing them."

## Historical Marker Locations

Knowles – near crest of Carelas' hill, less than a mile south of Greenville on 32  
Greenville – near four corners  
Drake – yards north of four corners  
Academy – in front of library, by sidewalk  
Academy – in front of library, on lawn, square in wooden frame  
Talmadge/Atwater – in front of Ronnie Baumann, across from Westerner, Rt 32  
Spees – on lawn in front of Greenwood Apts, just past park entrance  
First School – close to Irving Rd corner, close to former Chatterton house  
Lake – broken, needs to be replaced, currently in hands of land owner  
Ely – Cty Rt 38 above Flach, in front of weather beaten house  
Tannery – near corner of 38 and Newry Rd, across from Flack house  
English Lawyer – top of 26 hill by Orrin Stevens  
Brandy Hill – in front of main house of Pine Lake Manor, Rt 26  
Log Cabin – King Hill Rd, just before Weeks farm  
Manor House – Rt 81, by Prevost house, between Maple Ave and Ingalside Rd  
#16 – too worn to be repaired, on Basic Rd, a half mile hike in woods

## Greene Gleanings

By Raymond Beecher  
Greene County Historian

The weekly "Assembly Program" was long a part of the educational process in the early decades of the twentieth century and no more so than at the Greenville Free Academy. There can't be many left who recall the ones each Friday held in the large second floor combined teaching classroom, study hall and auditorium with the slightly raised platform at the front.

Those of us who had our classes in the two room annex would be "sandwiched" in when there was a special program of merit. The high school classes all took turns — one program a month. Of course there were few stage props or stage curtains but that was all accepted as a matter of course.

Scott Ellis and his Academy predecessor principals always opened the weekly assembly program with the "Pledge of Allegiance" and a patriotic song or two. A musically talented student would play the somewhat ancient upright piano with its occasionally



sticking keys. The west and north walls had numerous windows. For a slide program, some of the boys were assigned the task of pulling down the heavy dark shades and reversing the process at the program's conclusion. More than once, yanking the cords roughly down would

come the shade with a crash, much to the amusement of the rest of the student body who would give a round of applause.

For very special events such as graduation or the scheduling of the traveling professional players of Shakespeare, we walked in orderly procession by classes to the Vanderbilt Opera House. The Presbyterian Church was much closer but some members of that congregation frowned on "play acting." (Today it is a Center for the Arts).

When the new Greenville Central Rural School (then its correct title) was first used, the auditorium with its proper stage facilities was a luxury beyond comprehension. In the spring of the second year of its use (1934) our class had the responsibility for the Senior Play - "Sally Lou." Miss Muriel Wooster had the faculty responsibility and practice, practice we did! I had one of the major male roles and even recited the lines walking to and from school. The previous night's dress rehearsal was a

disaster with some of the actors missing cues and forgetting their lines. A few of us were playing practical jokes behind the backdrop. It was the last straw for Miss Wooster who ordered the curtains closed and sent us home predicting a complete disaster the next evening for the ticket purchasers.

Came Saturday night at 7:30 p.m., the auditorium filled to capacity, the curtain opened and the three acts performed without an error and to much applause. Years later when Muriel Wooster and Leonard Palmer came to my house at Coxsackie for assistance with the Christ Church, Greenville historical booklet, with a broad smile I reminded Miss Wooster how the Greenville Class of 1934 had defeated at least one of Murphy's Three Laws. (Sybil Tannebaum of Thomas Cole's Cedar Grove can testify to my efforts at practical joking.) Sybil, my training came on the stage of the Greenville Central School.

8-25-2007

## Greenville Properties on the Greene County Historical Register

# 127 Talmidge Irving House – private home on Rt 81 next to The Westerner store (owned by Gerald - or Gerard? - Irving)

# 124 Freehold Country Inn –corner of Rt. 67 and Rt 32 in the hamlet of Freehold (Ben and Terry Buel owned this building and ran a restaurant in it until recently, maybe they still do. It is now closed. Property also includes a barn that the Buels renovated and used as a catering hall for weddings, private parties, etc.)

# 132 Freehold Congregational Church, Rt. 67 Hamlet of Freehold, just beyond the “business district”. Sanctuary built in 1854. Stained glass windows imported from Italy installed in 1902.

# 118 Morning Mist Farm – just outside of Freehold on the road between Sunny Hill and Greenville Center. Owner: Art Napperstein (sp?)

# 123 Edgett Farm Cemetery – behind Sunny Hill Resort, owned by Gary Nicholson

# 102 Greenville Memorial Library – Route 32, Greenville

# 61 Christ Episcopal Church – stone church on Route 32

# 60 Provost Manor (“Hush Hush Farm”), west of Greenville, off Rt 81 (owner: Mrs. Rowan (sp?))

# 47 Methodist Church of Greenville & Norton Hill

# 41 Presbyterian Church, Rt. 32, Greenville (now owned by Town of Greenville), next to the Greenville Library

# 40 The Greenville Arms, Route 32, Greenville (Bed & Breakfast business)

# 148 Flach House, Newry (sp?) Rd, off Route 32 (owners: Phil & Barbara Flach)

# 140 Springbrook Farm, Rt 26 (owner last name:Capone)

**THREE FOR SALE**

**From Hudson Classics to Life on a Lakefront**



**WHAT** 4-bedroom house  
**HOW MUCH** \$164,900

This 2,200-square-foot brick house was built in the 1830s. It has wide pine floorboards and enclosed porches. There are two bathrooms. Agent: Andrea Smallwood, Heart Land Realty, (518) 731-2145; www.heartlandupstate.com.

*Information on properties was supplied by the listing companies.*



**WHAT** 4-bedroom house  
**HOW MUCH** \$540,000

Overlooking Sleepy Hollow Lake, this 2,400-square-foot house sits on a little over an acre. It has three bathrooms, two fireplaces, a finished walk-out basement-entertainment area, a master bedroom suite with a deck and a lower deck with a hot tub. Agent: Vicki Wolpert, Lake and Mountain Realty; (518) 731-3222; www.lakeandmountainllc.com.



**WHAT** 3-bedroom house  
**HOW MUCH** \$749,000

This 1754 Dutch stone house is secluded on 95 acres. It's 2,600 square feet and has original plank flooring and four large brick fireplaces. There are a pond, a new barn-style garage and an 18th-century stone smokehouse. It has two and a half bathrooms. Agent: David Ludwig, Gary DiMauro Real Estate; (518) 943-7533; www.garydimauro.com.



**LAY OF THE LAND**

**POPULATION** 1,743, according to a 2006 Census Bureau estimate.

**SIZE** 4.6 square miles.

**WHERE** Athens is 132 miles north of New York City, about a two-and-a-half-hour drive.

**WHO'S BUYING** Lawyers, journalists and other professionals from New York City and North Jersey.

**WHILE YOU'RE LOOKING** Rooms start at \$147.50 a night at Stewart House (2 North Water Street, 518-945-1357; www.stewarthouse.com). The inn also includes a well-regarded restaurant.

NATHANIEL BROOKS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

**TRADITION** Kathi Denniston tends bar at the Stewart House, a restored inn built when Andrew Jackson was in office.

By LISA A. PHILLIPS

**A**SHTON HAWKINS and Johnnie Moore had been living part-time in the second-home hot spot of Hudson, N.Y., for five years before the right house lured them across the Hudson River to the smaller and less-known village of Athens.

It was the Haight-Van Loan House, a 7,000-square-foot Federal mansion that has panoramic views of the Hudson River and looms over eight acres on a hill at the south end of the village. And they were able to buy it for just \$925,000.

"I feel like we made the bargain of the century," said Mr. Moore, a theater actor and producer who lives in Manhattan.

More than two years later, the couple are still enthusiastic about their find, which would have cost more than \$3 million across the river in Columbia County, local real estate agents say. They are now in the middle of an extensive restoration being overseen by Howard Hall Farm, a local firm that uses environmentally sensitive preservation techniques. The red shag carpeting has been ripped out, and a brace holds up the ceiling of the grand ballroom while an original beam of the house is being repaired.

"The house has been peeled back to its essence," said Mr. Hawkins, a consultant to Christie's and a former general counsel for the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The restoration of the Haight-Van Loan House is perhaps the perfect emblem for Athens. Its trove of historic homes in various states of restoration and repair has become a draw for second-home owners who have an eye for vintage architecture. Newly

spruced-up houses stand beside neglected properties of weed-infested yards, peeling paint and crumbling brick. Scaffolding is a common sight, and town gossip often revolves around who's fixing up what and how.

The Village of Athens, a separate municipality within the town of Athens, sits on the west bank of the Hudson River, four miles north of the Rip Van Winkle Bridge in Greene County. First settled in the late 17th century, the village, a port on the Hudson-Athens Ferry, became a thriving hub for shipbuilding, brick making and ice harvesting. Athens fell on hard times after the bridge went up in 1935, eliminating the need for the ferry, which closed in 1947. Athens's layout and architecture have remained essentially the same since its heyday in the late 19th century. It has more than 300 buildings on national and state historic registers and has the feel of a living museum of American architecture,

with examples of many of the predominant styles of the 18th and 19th centuries, including Federal, Greek Revival, Italianate, Stick, Second Empire, Folk Victorian and Queen Anne.

Geoff Howell, who owns a Manhattan design and production studio, bought a five-bedroom Italianate house four years ago for \$225,000. He has since bought two houses to restore and sell. "I've been interested in historic preservation my whole life but never felt I could make a difference in the city," he said. "But Athens is small enough that every house you restore makes a big difference in the community."

## The Scene

Ursula's Diner is a friendly gathering place across from a waterfront park and boat launching area. And kayaks, powerboats, tugs and barges are a common sight on the river.

Boating, fishing and other water sports are also popular at Sleepy Hollow Lake, a 750-home private community that surrounds a two-and-a-half-mile man-made lake outside the village. Sleepy Hollow includes tennis courts, a marina, a driving range, two swimming pools, a lodge and a campground.

Night life revolves mainly around the bar and restaurant at the Stewart House, a recently restored 1833 inn. The Athens Cultural Center hosts art openings and other events.

Otherwise, the social scene in Athens tends toward impromptu Saturday night gatherings. Sarah Gray Miller, editor in chief of Country Living magazine, and her husband, Tony Stamolis, a photographer, who live in Manhattan, bought a four-bedroom Italianate house two years ago for less than \$300,000, she said. They then persuaded friends in their New York social circle to buy four other houses in Athens.

The couple entertain often, filling their bedrooms with visitors and inviting friends to dinner parties that can expand from 6 guests to 16 in the span of an evening. "We can all walk to each other's houses, and there's something very casual about it," Ms. Miller said. "It's like the joy of living in a commune, but you don't actually have to share a house."

## Pros

Athens sits on a gradual slope up from the river, with houses and restaurants literally a stone's throw from the water. On the east side of the Hudson, railroad tracks limit river access in many communities, while in most towns on the west side, steep riverbanks pose a similar challenge.

Chris Baswell, a professor of medieval literature at Barnard and Columbia who lives in Manhattan, is renovating a Federal brick house, built around 1800, eight blocks up from the river. "I use a wheelchair, so the gentle grade is good," he said. "I can go anywhere in the village — the park, the diner, the river's right there."

Athens is smaller and less expensive than Hudson, a city across the river also noted for its stock of vintage homes. Though prices in recent years have begun to catch up, the median price in

Athens is still about \$50,000 less than in Hudson, according to the Greene County Multiple Listing Service.

## Cons

Besides a basic gas station-convenience store, there is no retail shopping in Athens. The closest supermarket is in Catskill, 10 minutes away.

## The Real Estate Market

Historic fixer-uppers can be found for \$100,000 to \$150,000 in the village, local agents say, but expect to pay at least \$200,000 for a three-bedroom house in move-in condition. Lot sizes in the village average a third of an acre.

Most lakefront homes at Sleepy Hollow cost \$350,000 to \$450,000, with off-lake properties available in the \$200,000 range, said Vicki Wolpert, who owns

Lake and Mountain Realty in Athens. Listings of more than \$500,000 are rare.

Athens has managed to hold its own in the down housing market. The median price of homes sold in the town of Athens, which includes the village proper, from January through mid-September 2008 was \$181,000, according to the Greene County Multiple Listing Service. In the last five years, the average price of a home rose more than \$100,000.

"Lower-priced deals on homes that need work can still be found, but it's not like it was," said Andrea Smallwood, the village mayor and a sales associate at Heart Land Realty in Coxsackie, N.Y.

The average listing stays on the market for about six months, about a month longer than in 2007. Local real estate agents estimate that 10 to 15 percent of the houses in the village of Athens and about 50 percent of the houses at Sleepy Hollow Lake are used as second homes.

The homes at Sleepy Hollow Lake are mainly A-frames and contemporaries built in the last 40 years. The property owners association regulates paint color and other features.

"We don't have the grand old houses," Ms. Wolpert said. "When people contact us, they are looking for lakefront. That's what attracts them first. Then we move on to what kind of home."