

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

May 2010, Issue 199

Greene County Historian

This fine May evening saw another solid turnout: Bob & Marie Shaw, Bette Welter, David & Judy Rundell, Phyllis Beechert, Harriett Rasmussen, Christine Mickelsen, Jeannette Rose, Al Drexel, Dot Blenis, Ron Golden, John Earl, Walter Ingalls, David Dorpfeld, and Don Teator.

Don had a few short things. One was the recent newspaper publicity about Phyllis's selection as volunteer of the year. A copy is included in this newsletter.

Also noted was Greene County's Home Tour in Windham the first Saturday of the June. My intentions are to attend so perhaps I might see some of you on the mountaintop.

We noted the new name for what was the Greenville Local, now called the Greene County News. (Since this meeting, I have picked up a copy of the newest newspaper, The Pioneer, which looks like a promising reincarnation of Greenville issues. Good luck on this venture.)

Later in the evening, John Earl discussed his efforts to preserve an old shed that is currently on school grounds, hoping to bring it onto town park land, with the in-

attention to use it for blacksmithing. Good luck, John. Another of John's interests is the South Barn in the Vanderbilt Park. He is concerned that the physical integrity of the structure needs to be strengthened and that the safety issues it may cause needs addressing very soon.

The major part of the evening was an introduction of our new County Historian, Dave Dorpfeld, to our local history group. Dave made a good impression, leaving no doubt to his interest and passion for local history and for the position he now holds and the duties it encompasses.

Dave told his own life story which, early, was spent on the family farm in Athens until the late-1950s. He graduated from Trine University, worked in the US General Accounting Office in Washington DC and Albany, eventually working for the Office of Children and Family Services for 12 years, before retiring to the "easy" life.

He has served as the treasurer for the Greene County Historical Society for thirty-some years, been involved with some of the background stuff, was one of the triumvirate that initially filled the county historian spot when Ray Beecher died, and was finally selected as the candidate to fill the spot.

Dave listed the major duties of his office: to research and write about local history (I hope you read his weekly column in the Wednesday Daily Mail); to teach and educate, especially in public appearance (which he was doing this evening); and to promote and advocate for historic preservation.

Dave mentioned his desire to work with all the community historical societies, noting the importance and quality of these efforts. Although these groups may compete, to some degree, with the county historical group for the attention of some individuals, Dave made sure to promote the efforts of these groups that deal with topics that complement county efforts. He made particular note of the Mountaintop Historical Society that has become a very 'healthy' organization.

He made note that the County Historian has no official connection, by law, with the Historical Society at the Bronck House but it is obvious that the two lend themselves to be connected easily.

More stories were told of his youthful days, of school, the Athens school building, Murderer's Creek, the Hudson River, pollution, his days in Acra where his rela-

tives kept the general store, Watkins products, the county fair in Cairo (how far back does that go?), Coxsackie Beach, and more.

The county will feature the Civil War over the four years the will mark the sesquicentennial (150 year anniversary).

It was a fun night, casual, informative, and getting to know another of the history players in the area.

A special thank you goes to you, Dave, for spending your evening with us.

A reprint of two pages of Hudson Valley is included. This series featured Top Ten Towns of the Hudson Valley.

A recent Dave Dorpfeld piece is included. Again, I think you will like his weekly column.

The next meeting, June 14, is a share session. Bring stories, artifacts, ideas, etc., to inform, enlighten, entertain, amuse us.

Take care,



Greene History Notes

Happy 75th birthday, Rip Van Winkle Bridge

By David Dorpfeld
Greene County Historian

Last week I wrote about the horse-powered ferries that plied the Hudson from the river towns of Coxsackie, Athens and Catskill during the early to mid 19th century. Those ferries were replaced by steam-powered boats which in turn were replaced by the Rip Van Winkle Bridge. I always enjoy crossing that bridge and the others that cross the Hudson between here and New York City. They are engineering marvels that are taken for granted because we see them regularly. I imagine the construction of the Rip Van Winkle Bridge was a constant topic of discussion at the time it was being built, just as the Thruway was as it cut a swath through Greene County when I was a boy. Opened on July 2, 1935, the bridge turns 75 this year.

The Rip Van Winkle Bridge is a 13 span cantilever and truss design, extends 5040 feet from Catskill to the Columbia County side of the river, has a ship clearance of 145 feet and cost \$2.4 million to build. The New York State Bridge Authority (NYSBA) estimated in 2008 that it would cost \$158 million to replace the bridge today. It is named after the main character in the well-known short story by Washington Irving. At the time it opened, there were only three other vehicular bridges spanning the Hudson south of Albany; Bear Mountain, Mid-Hudson and George Washington. Since then, four more have been added: Tappan Zee, Kingston

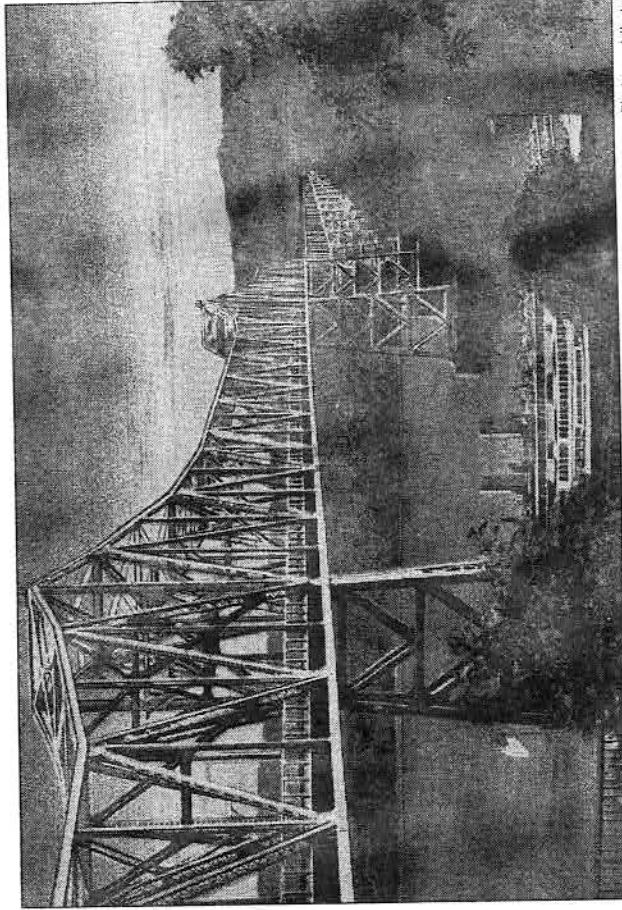


Photo contributed

during the Great Depression.

An interesting aside involves the Thomas Cole property. The original plans for the bridge called for the bridge approach to go through land owned by the Cole Family heirs. Because the state and the heirs could not agree on a fair price, the west approach to the bridge was moved further north.

When the bridge first opened tolls were charged in both directions. Passenger cars were charged 80 cents plus 10 cents per passenger up to a maximum of \$1. Trucks were subject to a charge ranging from under a dollar up to \$1.50. Motorcycles were charged 20 cents, or 35 cents with a sidecar. The lowest toll was 10 cents for pedestrians and bicycles. There was also a provision for 1- and 2-horse wagons. When you consider that many folks were not working in 1935 and others were working for very little, the tolls were very expensive. This may explain why some ferry boats continued to operate for a decade or more after the bridge was built. Crossing the bridge is a bargain today compared to when it was built.

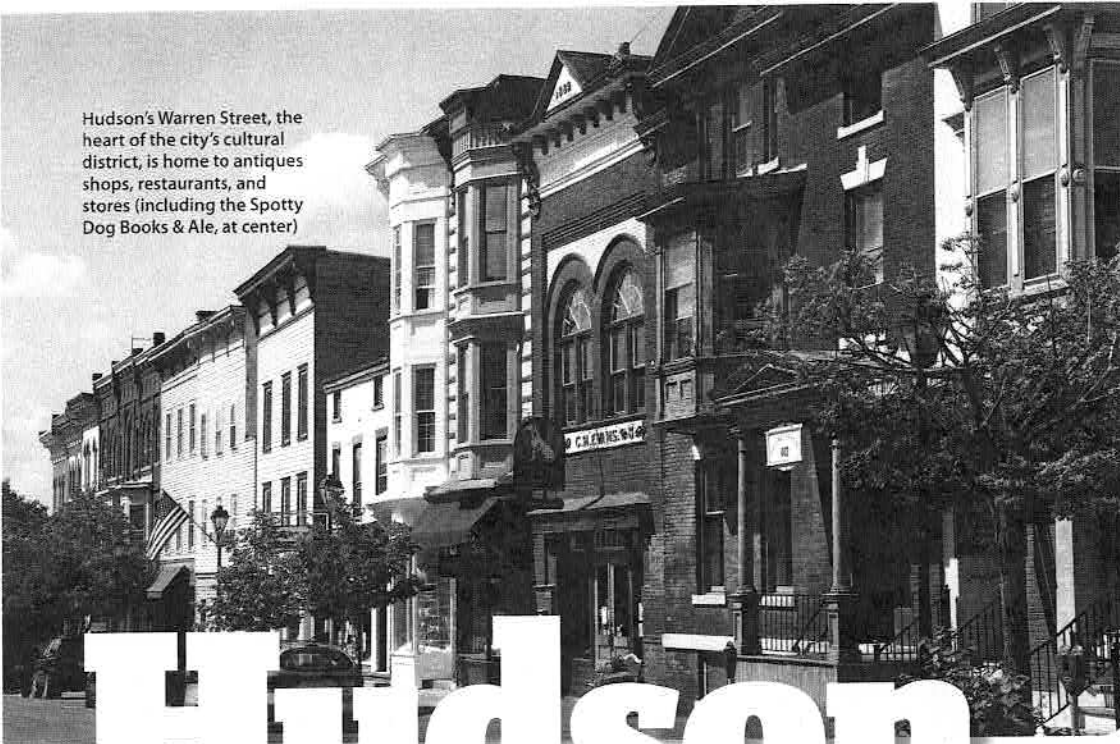
To reach columnist David Dorpfeld, e-mail yankeedavid@yahoo.com or visit him on Facebook at "Greene County Historian."

A vintage picture from the late 1940s or 50s taken from post cards.

Rhinecliff, Newburgh-Beacon and the Thruway bridge at Castleton. Windham Assemblyman Ellis W. Bentley proposed legislation in 1930 to build the Rip Van Winkle Bridge. Governor Franklin Roosevelt vetoed the bill after it passed the legislature because he felt the state could not afford the bridge at a time of reduced state revenues. What a novel thought. At the same time the Governor suggested the creation of a separate state entity to issue bonds which would be repaid by tolls to finance the new bridge. In 1932, the newly created New York State Bridge Authority passed a resolution to apply for loan from the federal Reconstruction Finance Corporation in order

to build the Catskill-Hudson Bridge. The Frederick Snare Construction Corporation of New York City won the bid for construction of the new bridge. The New York State Department of Public Works supervised the construction which began in 1934. The opening of the bridge in 1935 was quite a grand affair. Events included a luncheon, a parade of 50 official cars, and site activities. Governor Herbert H. Lehman and other state and local leaders were on hand. The ribbon-cutting was performed by Mrs. Frederick S. Greene on the Greene County side, and Laura Carter Miller on the Columbia County shore. According to the book "Hudson River Bridges" by Kathryn W. Burke, "Ribbon cuttings were set for each end of the bridge. Unfortunately there was only one pair of scissors. One of the toll collectors had to run from one end of the bridge to the other so both ribbons could be cut..." A natural boulder from the site excavation served as a pedestal for the bronze dedication tablet provided by George W. Williams, a state road engineer. Today that same boulder can be seen near the toll plaza. Approximately 3,000 cars crossed the bridge during the "free hours" that followed and the first toll was collected at 6 p.m. that day. According to NYSBA, over 400 people applied for the eight toll collector positions when the new bridge opened

Hudson's Warren Street, the heart of the city's cultural district, is home to antiques shops, restaurants, and stores (including the Spotty Dog Books & Ale, at center)



Location:

Western Columbia County

Population: 6,900

Median Household

Income: \$24,000

Fun fact: Diamond Street, a stretch of what is now called Columbia Street, was once an internationally known red light district; more than a dozen brothels operated there.

Notable residents: Frederic Church, landscape painter and owner of Olana; Philip Glass, composer of modern classical music; Martin Van Buren, former New York governor and United States president

Hudson

Columbia County

The unofficial antiques capital of the Hudson Valley, Hudson is a mecca for those whose interest in procuring old objects is so profound that they employ antique as a verb. The fact that the antique shops along Warren Street are decidedly high-end establishments might suggest that this is a city whose streets are paved with gold. It may surprise you to learn that Hudson is not at all hoity-toity.

Like Beacon, Hudson was once a thriving blue-collar city — the former was known for

reign of vice was the state-level crackdown on gambling and prostitution in the early '50s).

To walk the streets of the Hudson Historical District is to flip through the pages of *A Field Guide to American Houses*. All manner of architectural styles can be found here, from Second Empire to Queen Anne, Italianate to Gothic Revival. It was the variety of eye-catching architecture that drew the antiques dealers here in the 1980s — storefronts that were big, cheap, urban-chic, and a two-hour Amtrak ride away from New York City.

The demographics of Hudson have shifted in the last decade. When Lisa Durfee, owner of the wonderfully named vintage clothing store Five and Diamond, moved here 10 years ago, she found that the population skewed older. That is no longer the case. "It's a younger crowd

now," she says. "Every few years brings a new wave of hipper and younger people."

Also changing is the antiques-or-nothing makeup of downtown. You can now hang out at the Spotty Dog Books & Ale, peruse

the racks of used books and records at Jean Deux, take in a performance at Time and Space Limited arts center, or enjoy a cup of joe and a mouthwatering scene at the Parlor. Club Helsinki, the eclectic music venue that draws acts like Norah Jones, Michelle Shocked, and Gogol Bordello to its modest space in Great Barrington, has relocated to Hudson. The hope is that the city will continue to "grow into a place where you can shop for things other than antiques," as Durfee puts it.

Hudson's best-kept secret, ironically, is the river that bears its name. Tourists generally come for the shopping, and therefore head for town when they get off the train — in the opposite direction of the majestic waterway, which is, truth to tell, hard to locate without a map.

"A lot of people forget that the river is right here," says Durfee. Promenade Hill Park is there, with views of the Hudson-Athens Lighthouse. Plans are underway to build a boat launch, so kayakers can head to the Middle Ground Flats, the man-made island between Hudson and Athens. "The next wave for Hudson," she predicts, "is that we'll take advantage of being on the river."

Columbia

	2008	2009	% Change
Median Sales Price	\$222,500	\$199,950	-10.1
Number of houses sold	440	362	-17.7

New York State Association of Realtors Housing Survey

hats; the latter, cement — that fell on hard times in the '60s and '70s, only to rebound by reinventing itself as a tourist town. (Strictly speaking, of course, Hudson was always a tourist town; the coup de grace to the city's

What \$300,000 Will Buy:

Germantown (Columbia) \$324,900



A three-bedroom, circa 1858 carriage house. Pluses: This renovated home contains high ceilings, wideboard floors, and an updated kitchen with an arched ceiling. Additional features include a large deck and three-car garage.

Lexington (Greene) \$299,000



A six-bedroom farmhouse built in 1880. Pluses: This home is located on five acres with views into the mountains. Wood flooring, an enclosed sun porch, and a large kitchen are highlights — not to mention its close proximity to three major ski areas.

Windham Greene County

In 1997, *Men's Journal* named this mountain redoubt in the upper reaches of Greene County one of the top 10 "Dream Towns" in the U.S. Nothing has changed in the last 13 years to affect Windham's standing. In fact, we think it keeps getting better.

This is a one-of-a-kind tourist town. Outdoor enthusiasts flock here for hiking, fishing, hunting, golf — there are two magnificent 18-hole courses — and, of course, the skiing at Windham Mountain, with 46 trails and 10 lifts. This August, the International Cycling Union's 2010 UCI Mountain Bike World Cup finals will bring an estimated 30,000 riders and their fans into town. But culture mavens can also get their fix at one of several art galleries or at the famed Windham Chamber Music Festival.

So while there are a number of vacation homes here, more and more folks are deciding to call Windham home on a full-time basis, including commuters to Albany (which is just about 40 miles away). It seems the nice mix of city sophistication and down-home country charm is irresistible. Cathy Hennessy, a sales manager at Giandana-Loftus Real Estate, and her husband bought a second home here in 2001. But last year, they sold their primary residence in the Jersey suburbs, and moved to Windham. "We decided to come up here and slow down the pace," she says, noting that there is no grocery store, just a deli that stocks the staples. The nearest malls (in Kingston or Albany) are at least 45 minutes away. The nearest traffic light is 10 miles away. "When people come to visit, they ask 'What's that noise?'" says Hennessy. "And I say, 'The silence.'" The nights are just as dark as they are silent, she reports, making Windham ideal for stargazing.

And to top it all off, fine dining has finally arrived. Bistro Brie & Bordeaux, a classic French eatery — and a onetime Best of Hudson Valley winner — opened in a charming space on Main Street a few years ago. And now the Cave Mountain Brewing Company, which has been in business since September 2008, makes its own craft beer, root beer, and even absinthe.

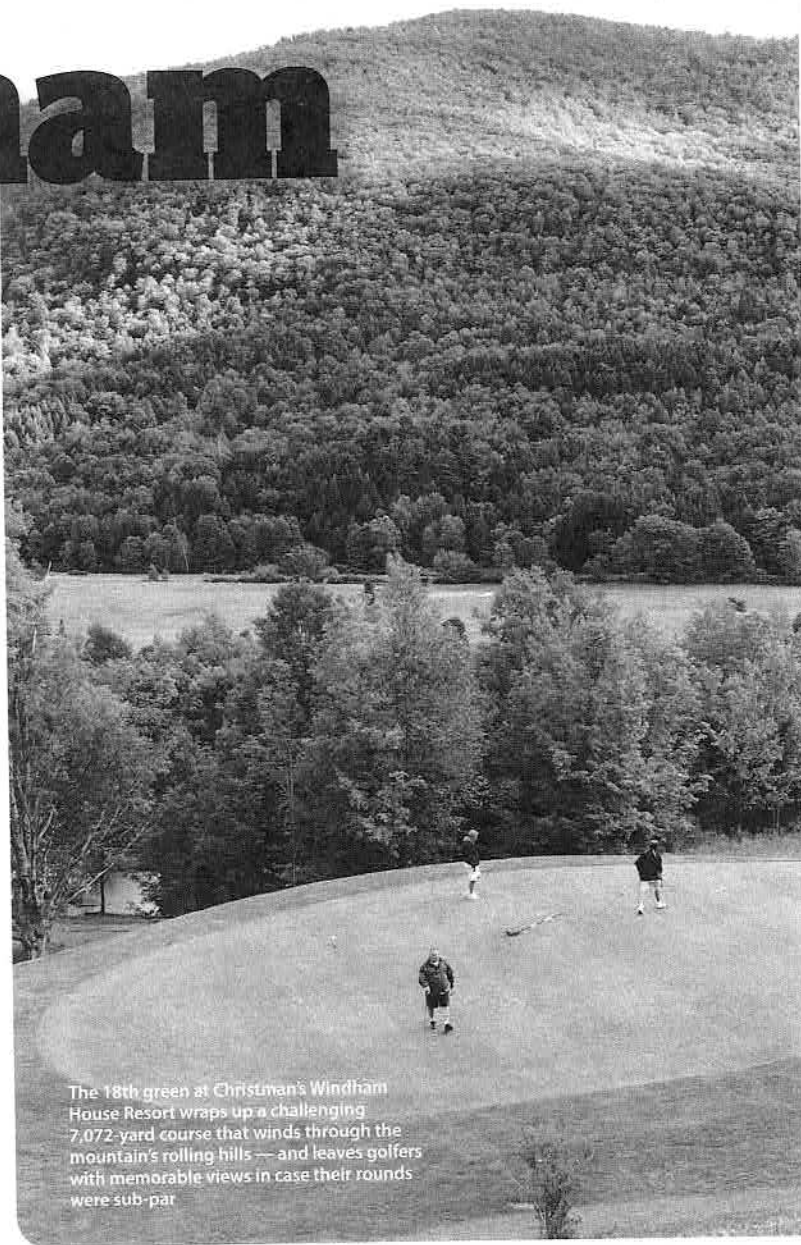
Location: Upper Greene County, bordering Catskill State Park

Population: 1,900

Median Household Income: \$36,000

Nomenclature: Known as Osbornville until a political rival of Bennet Osborn, the postmaster for whom the town was named, had the place rechristened Windham

Notable residents: Scott Adams, cartoonist and creator of "Dilbert"



The 18th green at Christman's Windham House Resort wraps up a challenging 7,072-yard course that winds through the mountain's rolling hills — and leaves golfers with memorable views in case their rounds were sub-par

Greene

	2008	2009	% Change
Median Sales Price	\$180,000	\$165,000	-8.3
Number of houses sold	322	323	0.3

New York State Association of Realtors Housing Survey

Freehold (Greene) **\$287,500**



A five-bedroom, four-bath home. **Pluses:** This circa 1795 house is the oldest home in the quaint hamlet where it is

located. With three fireplaces, marble baths, and new mechanicals, this home is suitable for single or multiple families.

Poughkeepsie (Dutchess) **\$325,000**



A classic Dutch colonial, built circa 1900. **Pluses:** With three fireplaces, hardwood floors, granite counters, and period architectural details, this four-

bedroom home combines contemporary needs with an historic aesthetic.

Poughkeepsie (Dutchess) **\$310,000**



A four-bedroom Colonial. **Pluses:** Two words: stone fireplace. If

that's not enough, this updated home has several other assets such as a new refrigerator and stove, recessed lighting in the family room, bathrooms with granite features, walk-in closets, and a porch with skylights.

ALBANY



Photo contributed

From left, Senator James L. Seward (R/C/1-Oneonta) joins Senior Citizens' Day honorees from Greene County, Phyllis Beechert, Richard Golden, and Greene County Department for the Aging Director Thomas Yandeu, at the governor's mansion.

Greene County's Outstanding Senior Citizens

May was Senior Citizen's Month, and each year the Department for the Aging Advisory Council conducts a search for outstanding senior citizens to be recognized for their contributions.

Dedicated individuals are chosen to receive special recognition from the Greene County Legislature in the categories of Senior Citizen of the Year and Outstanding Contribution by a Senior Citizen.

At the May 19 meeting of the Greene County Legislature, Phyllis Beechert of Greenville was announced as the Senior Citizen of the Year and Richard Golden of Athens was honored with Outstanding Contribution by a Senior Citizen.

For many years Phyllis Beechert has given of herself to the community of Greenville and beyond. The following is just an example of the organizations she has been involved in to make her community better: Charter member, president and life member of the Greenville Volunteer Fire Company Ladies Auxiliary; Treasurer of Greenville Fire District #1; Secretary of the Board of Fire Commissioners and of the Greenville Rescue Squad; member of the Board of Directors and Greene County Coordinator of the American Cancer Society; Senior Warden of the Vestry of Christ Episcopal Church; and Treasurer of Greenville Area Interfaith Council, Greenville Area Food Pantry and C.R.O.P. Hunger Walk. She has also organized transportation for dialysis patients, drives people to medical appointments, and

phones and visits the sick and homebound.

Richard Golden is an individual dedicated to improving his community. A member and past VP of the Board of Directors of the Coxsackie-Athens Rotary Club, he is the creator and chairman of the Rotary Club's Handyman Program and is the 'go-to guy' connecting both the Coxsackie and Athens food pantries. He is a former member of Athens Playscape, the planners of the children's playground in Athens.

He is a member of the Catskill Kiwanis, the Athens Community Foundation, a former home delivered meals volunteer, and a past chairperson for the Sleepy Hollow Lake Environmental Control Committee. He is a member of the Board of Directors and serves on the Capital Campaign Committee of the Greene County YMCA. In his spare time Richard is also a tri-athlete who has competed in the Senior Olympics on both the state and national levels.

In recognition of their significant contributions to the Greene County community, the Greene County Legislature presented Certificates of Merit to Emily Brunner, Betty Ellett, Richard Muggeo, Anthon Patasso, George Story and Carol Voeks.

The Legislature also proclaimed May as Greene County Senior Citizens Month to express its appreciation for the commitment and valuable service of outstanding senior citizens throughout Greene County.