

FOREWORD

All through the summer and fall of 1893 a humorous, story-telling artist named Richard Lionel De Lisser was exploring the Catskills. He travelled alone in that most serviceable and economical of vehicles, a light buggy. The motive power of the buggy was an elderly but faithful horse named Cherry-Tree. De Lisser was no ordinary tourist like the thousands of others who were spending their vacations that year in the cool, bracing air of the Catskills and amid its scenic wonders—he explained to all he met that he had come on business, for he was the "Art Manager for the Catskills" of the Picturesque Publishing Company of Northampton, Mass. Already this company had published a profitable series of "Picturesque" books. Each was devoted to a Massachusetts county—an additional one dealt with Detroit, Mich. Now under De Lisser's guidance a work to be called "*Picturesque Catskills*" was in progress. It would be published in two volumes; the first devoted to the parts of the mountains lying in Greene County, the second, planned for a year or two in the future, would take care of Ulster County's share of the Catskills. The pair of books would mark a great advance upon all previous accounts of the region for they would feature a magnificent series of photographs to be taken by the Art Manager with the help of the mahogany and brass camera which he carried in his buggy.

By the late 1880's new developments in photography and printing were having an effect on many aspects of American life. For one thing, the character of books of travel and regional description was being revolutionized. The dry plate had displaced the cumbersome wet plate of previous decades and was making photography easier and more certain. The new half-tone process of reproducing photographs for publication by transposing them into a series of tiny black dots, had been welcomed by the public. The older methods of engraving on wood and steel were becoming obsolete.

Among those who responded to the new possibilities opened to publishers was Charles F. Warner, a Northampton, Mass., newspaper editor. In 1890, in connection with a local historical celebration, Warner brought out a "county history" lavishly illustrated with photographs—this was *Picturesque Hampshire* which became the first of Warner's successful Picturesque series. The book and its successors were the results of a collaboration of writers, photographers and artists in pen and ink and wash. The accompanying text was a hodge-podge of fresh essays on county history, folklore, legend and topography, reprintings of earlier efforts, poems, fiction and paid advertising—this last decently restricted to the final pages of the books. A young local artist named Clifton Johnson who had been commissioned to make a few pen and ink drawings for *Picturesque Hampshire* bought a camera and took pictures for this and later volumes in the series. Soon Johnson left Charles Warner's stable of Picturesque contributors and embarked on a notable independent career as folklorist, travel writer and photographer. R. Lionel De Lisser took Johnson's place. In 1892 he worked for Warner on *Picturesque Berkshire*. The following summer he headed westward, bought Cherry-Tree, and turned his rapid rectilinear lens upon the Catskill Mountains. De Lisser had a right to feel hopeful for he brought decided talent and experience to his task.

New York was De Lisser's home town, but like many other young Americans with leanings toward the arts, he had gone to Europe to study. Munich was then the fashionable place for American art students to gather. In 1874 De Lisser graduated from Munich's Royal Bavarian Academy with a bronze medal bestowed upon him by Ludwig III, better known as the mad king of Bavaria. Back in New York De Lisser painted industriously—some of his paintings were engraved and found places on many a parlor wall. Their titles amply suggest their character. One was "The Fagot Gatherers", another was "The Return at Evening". In the early 1880's De Lisser left for Springfield, Mass. to become a teacher of drawing and painting of the classes held by the Springfield Art Association. By 1893 he had added photography to his other means of expression and had developed an excellent eye for the significant elements of a region. He was also showing considerable skill in composition. But De Lisser was not arty, he strove for crisp detail and straight-forward realism. When he followed Warner's Picturesque pattern and introduced human interest, he seldom slipped into sentimentality.

The first of the proposed two volumes on the Catskills appeared in

1894 as *Picturesque Catskills*. It was the last of Charles Warner's Picturesque series. But De Lisser went ahead on his own. In 1896 he began publishing *Picturesque Ulster* in parts. Only eight parts were published. Sales were disappointing and the project staggered to an end, uncompleted. De Lisser took the failure hard, they say. His health suffered and he left for Munich in the hope that this change of scene would benefit him. There—in September 1907—he died.

No one whose affections have been captured by the Catskills can turn the pages of *Picturesque Catskills* without a sense of growing excitement. For here De Lisser has managed by the use of the time machine known as a camera to make the Catskill Mountains of 1893 stand still for our information and delight. For the click of his shutter stopped the people and the landscape of the mountains in their tracks that summer and fall and gave to a few moments in their existence a kind of paper immortality. In De Lisser's pages farmers of 1893 still get in the hay and oat crops of that year, the blacksmiths shoe horses, customers enter country stores, mountain people wait outside their little post offices while letters are being sorted, gypsy horse traders and organ grinders with monkeys plod the dusty mountain roads, women rub and rinse the weekly wash, coon hunters return from their sport, triumphant. Summer boarders climb High Peak or enjoy the rustic fun of a straw ride.

The landscape in its own way stands still at De Lisser's command—it pauses in its evolution from primeval forest to farm and industrial land and back again. The close cropped pastures and neat valley fields of 1893 survive in the pictures De Lisser took—his head under the black focussing cloth, his eyes fixed on the landscapes, taking shape upside down on his ground glass screen.

While Cherry-Tree tied to a fence post, happily munched his oats, his master worked his magic on the buildings of the Catskills. One by one, by twos or threes or by dozens, they were lured in through De Lisser's lens and their images captured—weathered old grist mills, crumbling pioneer log cabins, summer hotels spick and span with white paint, their piazzas creaking with rocking chairs; churches (the Baptist one at Acra is shown topped by a gilded hand pointing to heaven), farm houses of Dutch and Yankee inspiration, barns in all their variety, Main Street business buildings with characteristic loading platforms and sheltering balconies, mountain top observatories.

De Lisser's photographs (plus a few taken by others) make up the chief charm of *Picturesque Catskills*—but they are far from forming the only charm. Some fifty sensitive drawings by Catskill painter, B. B. G. Stone add another entrancing dimension to the book, a few of Clifton Johnson's left over from previous Picturesque ventures are also tossed in. Two capable wash drawings of De Lisser's (on pages 5 and 152) begin and end the main body of the book. The text too, has its moments of appeal. For if it is sometimes confusing in its wanderings, it also includes De Lisser's own "Artist's Ramblings" with their relaxed and often humorous account of the pilgrimage of one man and a horse through the Catskills in search of the picturesque. The Ramblings are rich with trophies of folklore and observation—of all the materials which wind in and out among the pictures they are the best worth reading. Included in the text are examples of the manufactured legend and lore favored in the Catskills of the nineties—such as The Tragedy of the Great Table Rock on pages 36 to 39, and The Legend of the French Girl of Kaaterskill Clove, pages 93 to 100. But this account is more balanced by Van Deusen's excellent analysis on pages 21 and 22 of the long-suffering legend of the Salisbury halter—it was rare in 1893 for any American legend to be subjected to such clear-eyed scrutiny.

For many years the original edition of *Picturesque Catskills* has been treasured in many homes. Surviving copies betray by torn and soiled pages and disintegrating bindings that they have been paid the greatest tribute a book can receive—that of hard use. The new edition now accurately reprinted from the scarce original and with a more useful index added, will surely be paid a similar tribute.

ALF EVERS.

Hutchin Hill Road
Shady, New York

September, 1967

PICTURESQUE CATSKILLS - GREENE COUNTY

In the summer and fall of 1893, Richard Lionel De Lisser traversed Greene County, taking pictures and writing accounts of his travels.

The section on Greenville starts on pg 129, immediately after the New Baltimore section..

Greenville –The town of Greenville forms the western boundary of the neighborly towns of New Baltimore and Coxsackie, and also part of the Northern line of Greene County, its thirty or forty square miles being originally taken (part indirectly) from Coxsackie and possessed under patent by Arent Pietersen Coeymans, (his grant is spoken of in Coxsackie “Rambles” and extends from them into this township) and Lt.-Col. Augustine Prevost, whose property contained some 5000 acres and who was the only one of the original grantees who settled upon any portion of their lands. Both he and his son, Lt. Augustine Prevost, had served in the royal army, principally in the French and Indian war, and their patent was secured, in part, through the certificate of such services, dated 1764, by Gen. Gage. The present town was organized in 1803. In 1808, the name was changed from Greenville to Freehold, but in the same year and within six months the name was again changed back, being confirmed as Greenville, by special act in 1809. The population is between two and three thousand.

Few of the villages of Greene County can compare, in the beauty of their homes, or in the general air of neatness and comfort that pervades this entire village. The larger number of inhabitants are in comfortable circumstances, taking pride, as one can see, in having not only their own homes and grounds well-kept and in good shape, but also the village streets and public buildings. It is one of the a few villages in the county that does not encourage the taking of summer boarders. I do not know as the citizens object to them, but they do not seek them, leaving the entertainment of such as do come to the one hotel in the centre and a few boarding houses near by. I found very comfortable quarters in the Greenville hotel, on my second visit there, late in the fall, and in the midst of a heavy wind and snow-storm. Naturally the heating arrangements may have seemed more important to me than they would to a summer border, but just think of it, steam heat in every one of the newly remodeled rooms!

Such enterprise in a little town of a few hundred people and twelve miles from the nearest railroad, deserves mention. My first visit to the village was made during

PICTURESQUE PUBLISHING CAMP NORTHAMPTON MA 1894

the summer months, and it was during the interval between that one and the present visit that the improvements I speak of were made. It was an agreeable surprise to me, for as much as we may eulogize and poetize to over the departed open log-fire of our fathers, when we are through with the sentiment and it happens to be a really cold day, we creep off to some more modern and prosy contrivance to keep warm. I recollections of Greenville village are, in greater part from my first visit. Then North Street, with its pretty homes in their beds of blossoming flowers, was at its best, and Academy Park with its nicely trimmed green carpet, shady trees and white buildings looked what it really is, the pride of the village. Walking through North Street I could not help wondering at the quantity of flowers that were growing in almost every yard, the neighbors seeming to vie with each other in their prolific production. I remember thinking as I strolled along inhaling their perfume with which the air was laden, that so much labor and care as was shown on every hand in their cultivation, could only be given by people who loved flowers, for it is one thing to have a hothouse, with a paid gardener to do your work, and quite another to do it yourself. The first may show love, but the last shows love and devotion. Continuing my thoughts I arrive at the conclusion that these people would make good friends and neighbors, and good people to live with.

At the upper end of North Street is the little stone the Episcopal Church, which, in architecture and surroundings, resembles strongly its English village prototype. The rectory is close by its side. Below, or south of the hotel, on the street, the flowers are as plentiful and the homes as pretty, but built more closely together -- more thickly settled. At the lower is the Methodist Church, with a tapering steeple so high that I at first thought I should have to take my picture of it in sections, but I finally secured a fair view by placing my camera in somebody's front yard quite a distance away from the edifice. The back of the church is a long shed used by the out-of-town members of the congregation who drive in to meetings, as a shelter for their horses and carriages. Outside and at one end of this building I found an old stage-coach, a relic of the past, that had outlived its usefulness and had been hauled there and left, exposed to the elements, to fall to pieces and rot. The grass and field flowers had grown up around it, little saplings or bushes had forced their way in between the spokes of the half-buried wheels and through the open flooring, and creeping vines had

twined themselves in a loving embrace about every part of the old coach which they could reach. A party of children had taken possession of the old weather-beaten veteran, and with childish ingenuity were acting the several parts of driver, passengers and horses, the driver and the driven accommodately changing places while the two little girls -- who were always inside passengers -- would get out and visit imaginary people who offered them imaginary refreshments. I managed to approach unobserved, and from behind a friendly hedge had my picture nicely focused and was about to press the button, when an "Hurrah" from the driver and passengers (inside and out) announced to me that another one of the numerous stops was over and another imaginary ride had begun, but this time with no horse. The noise had attracted the attention of an old cow that was feeding near, and just as I took my picture she looked over the fence as if to ask what all this was about. I was discovered at the same moment by the happy youngsters, and as I shouldered my camera and marched off from my ambush without explanation, I have no doubt that they were asking themselves the same question as the cow, which will be answered when they see the picture.

Main Street crosses North Street at right angles, and is the business street of the village. Here I found the post-office and drug store, the grocery and other stores, together with numerous little shops and a blacksmith. In front of the last was an interesting group of men watching a loosened shoe being fastened on the foot of a passing traveler's horse.

Fronting the park on Main Street is a newly built opera-house of which the villagers feel justly proud. As I have before stated, I found on my last visit to the place, that winter was not only there, but hard at work covering the lawns and plants with a coverlet as white and as clean as the pretty homes and churches I had so admired when there before. The weather being too inclement for work outside, I joined the usual party that congregates at such times in the village inn. I have always found the conversations, debates and arguments that are sure to be indulged in on such occasions, full of interest and improvement, both in phraseology and wisdom. This particular session proved no exception to the rule.

In every village you will find some one man who has a profound knowledge of everything in general, and of the subject then under discussion in particular, and

who, by his forensic power (or "gift of gab," as the Irishman has it) has attained the position of, and is acknowledged as, the village talker, a fountain of wisdom and eloquence, which when working, must be listened to in silence and with respect. Such an official joined our party that afternoon at the hotel and at once put a stop to the heresies and schisms of the lesser lights who had been ambitiously airing their opinions and courageously manufacturing evidence to support the same.

On coming in he greeted his acquaintances and fellow townsman familiarly, unwound his long tippet or muffler, removed his coat, and exchanged the few jokes pleasantly with the landlord. Then selecting a comfortable arm-chair, he placed it in a commanding spot and seating himself, assumed the office of his position and proceeded to business.

"This 'ere is the wur-s-t storm we have had in these parts in thirty-two years."

Waiting a few minutes, and receiving no response, he repeated the assertion in a louder tone, as if challenging contradiction. To this a mild-mannered man feebly responded that it was pretty bad.

"Pretty bad! pretty bad!" the talker repeated in a crescendo, "I should say it wuz putty bad, and that's a pretty bad way of expressing what this storm is, I think" (with an emphasis on the word I).

To this the mild-mannered man made no response, but shifted uneasily in his seat, looked out of the window, and finally picking up a small stick, started to whittle it, accompanying his labor with a nervous little whistle, that made no noise but a wheezing sound like the escaping air from a punctured bellows. Our speaker, finding that he could not even elicit a response or provoke a controversy with the whittling man, turned his attention to the rest of us. The subjects that you generally provoke discussion or argument, such as religion, politics and law, were brought up and touched lightly upon by him without success. No one cared to engage with him. His superior knowledge being conceded by our silence, and finding no opposition, he retired from his aggressive position and became affable. Leaning back in his chair and crossing his legs, he surveyed his domain for a moment or two, and finding us all peaceful and non-combatant he concluded to reward us for our docility by telling a

wonderfully tough and long yarn about a horse that he once owned. Now this tempering of kindness with discipline may have been all right and was no doubt thoughtful in him, but it was as wicked and unjust in him to tell the story he did, and force it on the belief of his peaceful subjects, as the stamp act or the tea tax was to our forefathers, and it would have produced coming from any other source, a rebellion about as quickly.

He had just gotten well under way, and, encouraged by our silence, was stating, "I've driv that horse from New York city tew Catskill town, 'twix' sunrise and sunset in one day (one hundred and fifteen miles) and never turned a hair on him nuther" – when a team drove up in front of the hotel and two bundles of clothing got out, one proving to be a school-marm from Green Lake, Athens, who had come to Greenville to attend the district school conference being held there. The other was a man of small stature, who, after seeing to his horse, came in and joined our party, arriving in time to hear that last part of the truthful tale which our village fountain was spouting. Without waiting to read and move his muffler, -- which was wound several times around his head, leaving only his eyes visible -- the stranger challenged the statement being made by our speaker, that "That ere horse wuz the greatest horse the ever stood on four legs," and defiantly stated that he had "owned a horse once that could down any horse in bottom, speed, or beauty, that ever was or ever will be owned in Greene County!"

The clarion notes of herald trumpet sounding the tournament challenge, could never have the electrified or stirred the hearers more than did this emphatic defiance that was cast down as a gauge of battle, thoroughly awaking our party. The little man with the muffle seemed to us like a knight of the olden time who, with visor down and sword drawn, had come to deliver us from oppression, and give battle to the tyrant. Long will the memory of the wordy battle that followed, linger in the minds of the villagers. Without a pause the doughty champions charged, with cut and thrust, swinging mighty clubs of argument that would ever and anon be brought down with staggering force upon the opponent's head. So mighty were these blows that at times we, the onlookers, would think the battle lost or won, but no; gathering his scattered forces together, the prostrate one would rise and circle round to charge him on a new subject. History, ancient and modern, literature, art, law, politics and religion were

used in turn. One, two, three hours passed -- our man was surely giving way, his weapons broken or beaten from his hands, by this strange deliverer from Green Lake – our Lohengrin. Beads of perspiration stood out on his defenceless head, humiliation was stamped on his flushed face. To suffer defeat was bad enough, but to suffer it in front of his subjects, and at the hands of an unknown man, that was too much! Silently our beaten leader gathered his wraps together, and speaking that he had an engagement, strode through the door and over to the grocery across the street. The Green Lake champion had never stopped for a moment, the words coming from his mouth without apparent effort, like bullets from a machine gun. Nor did he stop now, the cloud continued; addressing first one and then another, he tried to inveigle us into a battle with him. Finding we would not enter the lists, he hurried over to the grocery, in pursuit of his former antagonist (the spectators following), and finding him behind the stove, nursing his wounds, he routed him out, and, as you have seen a victorious rooster chase his defeated opponent from place to place after a victory, so the knight from Green Lake chased his bedraggled opponent from grocery to hotel, and from hotel to grocery.

The victory was complete, his enemy beaten into silence at all points, retired for safety to the bosom of his family. The Green Lake champion after vain efforts to obtain another victim -- trying us all from the landlord behind the bar to the cook in the kitchen, -- hitched up his team remarking that as his eight girls were schoolteachers, and away all day, it was rather quiet in his direction, and that he was rather lonesome at times, but that he enjoyed a little chat now and then, drove off.

The following morning proving pleasant, I drove to the Prevost estate, a little distance from the centre. It was called "Hush-Hush," at that time the original house was built by Augustine Prevost, a French-Swiss native and an officer in the service of the British crown. At that time, 1793, the country was one unbroken wilderness, and the quiet stillness of the forest that surrounded the house, suggested its name. To this peaceful solitude, shortly after the house was completed, Prevost brought his young bride, who traveled on a pillion behind him from Catskill over the only road possible, a trail between the blazed trees. This original house, or its frame, and is now the east wing of the present Prevost mansion. Here he spent his

life, improving his property, building roads and school-houses, and homes for his tenants, to whom he offered every inducement to settle on his domains. To him Greenville is indebted for its beautiful Academy Park, he having given or donated this property, as well as the site now occupied by the Presbyterian Church and the Academy. He numbered among his friends of the day, Sir William Johnson, Alexander Hamilton, Aaron Burr and others. He was a man highly respected by his associates and neighbors, although naturally, from his English education, someone reserved in character. His grandson, Theodore L. Prevost, now owns and lives upon the property, which has been greatly reduced by sales, an area to about one hundred acres. The old house contains many valuable and interesting pictures, bric-a-brac and papers, which, it is to be regretted, our limited space forbids a reproduction of.

About two miles below Greenville, on the road to Freehold, there lived, early in the present century, two old maids. They owned a little log hut there, and a small piece of property surrounding it, in common. They were supposed to be sisters, but in fact were not related by the ties of blood in any way. They had both of them, in their younger days, experienced a romance that had broken their hearts, and the bond of sorrow between them had drawn the two close to each other in womanly sympathy. Together they had come from the old country to Connecticut, and from there to this place, seeking peace and forgetfulness in the wilderness. They never told their story, or anything in fact, relating to themselves, that could serve as a clue to their identity or past life. They spent their time in the necessary work about the log-house and garden which was filled with wild flowers and terns, and in painting water-color pictures which they sold among the neighboring settlers, for small sums, the highest price being asked was twenty-five cents. These paintings, two of which we reproduce, are unique in the extreme, showing great originality in conception, drawing and color, as well as in the medium employed for their production. Their subjects were generally selected from the Bible or profane history, in which they seem to have been well versed. The paper used was the wrappings of candles and tea boxes, or something of that sort. The pigments were of home manufacture. They would hunt through the woods and fields for certain flowers, berries and weeds, which they would boil or bruise to obtain the color they desired. These crude materials were sometimes helped out with the addition of brick-dust, and in fact by

anything that these primitive artists found suitable for the work in hand. The lady known as Miss Wilson was the artist-in-chief, the other, Miss Brundage, the farmer and housekeeper. They were discovered in the "thirties," by Theodore Prevost, and were then about fifty years of age. Their paintings are scattered, by purchase, from Canada to Mobile, and are now highly prized by the owners. Theodore Cole, Esq., furnished the originals from which our engravings were named.

The village of Freehold is near the boundaries of Cairo and Durham, and occupies the site of what was once a Mohegan Indian village of considerable importance. The stone implements of these people are still found in the surrounding meadows, or "flats," as they are called. Their cemetery was utilized by the early settlers for the burial of their own dead, and is still used as a place of interment, or was until quite lately. Its grounds are full of graves, and beautifully situated on a hill or bluff, within a short distance of the village, that overlooked what must have once been an extensive lake or pond. The village is a favorite place of resort for summer people, situated in the center of numerous natural attractions, with excellent mail service and telegraph facilities. Mrs. Cecilia Van Norman, whose charmingly descriptive pen has afforded so much pleasure to the readers of the magazines of this country, has her home here, and shares it, during the summer months with such people as are congenial in taste and refinement. Her place, Lacy Hall, can be seen in the picture in entitled "Along the Village Street." Within the township of Greenville, and comprising part of that corporation, is Norton Hill, Greenville Centre (or the "Hemlocks," as it was formerly called, East Greenville and Gay Head, all small hamlets or settlements, with the usual stores, churches and other buildings necessary for the dispensing of the comforts of mind and body.

This piece ends on pg 136, to be followed immediately by the section on Durham.