

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

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Prevost Hall, Presbyterian Church

A head count showed a few more than thirty attended the May meeting at Prevost Hall, including: Tom Ecobelli, Roman Valdez, Stephanie Ingalls, Deb Von Atzingen, Bill Von Atzingen, Bob Shaw, Kathy Smith, Rich Ceasar, Barbara Walter, Margaret Donohue,

LuAnn Quackenbush, Gail Nichol森, Carmel Rustick, Brenna Rustick, Jonas Havens, Jackie Massaro, Audrey Matott, Bill Matott, Christine Mickelsen, Debra Teator, Don Teator, and another dozen or so whose attendance evaded paper and memory.

A Brief History of Prevost Hall

Audrey Matott

(I had the pleasure of presenting “A Brief History of Prevost Hall” to the GLHG at the May meeting. We also were joined by many friends of Community Partners of Greenville (www.cpog.org), whose continued efforts are improving Prevost Hall (formerly Greenville Presbyterian Church). – Audrey)

At the heart of Greenville are two acres of land adorned with the Greenville Public Library, Prevost Hall, the Scout Building and a pond that not only represent the town’s iconic landscape but they also anchor the community to its history and one of its founders that instituted that land with only two purposes- religion and education.

Among the three buildings there is what is today known as Prevost Hall, but for over 200 years prior it was the Greenville Presbyterian Church (GPC).

The GPC was organized on May 19, 1790, and in 1793 built its first, although never completed, structure slightly northwest of where the structure stands today (Beers, 1884).

In 1800, Major Augustine Prevost gifted two acres of land for the sole purpose of “religious and educational use” to the town. This land is located near the northwest section of the Intersection of State Routes 32 and 81 in Greenville and throughout the history of the town has been a gathering place for the community.

In 1764, the English crown had bestowed entitlement to over 7,000 acres of land in what is now a large part of Greenville to General Augustine Prevost and his son Major Augustine Prevost as a reward for their service in the Royal Provincial Corps (Beecher, 1997).

Following the American Revolution, Major Prevost maintained his established Prevost Patent under controversial circumstances.

According to Raymond Beecher’s, *Out to Greenville and Beyond*, “The Treaty of Peace specified that no reprisals were to be made against those Americans who had aided and sided with the British Crown.”

Beecher goes on to explain that it is not exactly clear how Prevost maintained his patent as other relatively local families that

had been loyal to the English crown lost their claims. Beecher suggests it was Prevost's connection to powerful New York attorney Aaron Burr that may have aided him in maintaining his claim instead of it being awarded to the patriots that had settled and developed the land there as well.

Beecher wrote, "A third factor, and probably the most important one, was the ability of Augustine Prevost to utilize the services and influence of an attorney high in the officialdom of the new state. Aaron Burr was related to the Prevost's by reason of his marriage in 1782 to Widow Theodosia Prevost, wife of Major Augustine's deceased uncle. For many years during the lifetime of Augustine, Aaron Burr provided legal assistance, coming to Greenville when necessary."

Thus, as to why Prevost gifted two acres of his disputed 7000 acre patent for righteous but restricted purposes is unclear. However, it appears it may have been at least in part, to provide a church on the land he was committed to the crown to improve. Furthermore, perhaps it was the influence of Rev. Beriah Hotchkin that secured the endowment.

According to a reprinted bulletin for the 100th Anniversary of the GPC on May 19, 1890 it states: "Perhaps we should say this gift of land was made because of Major Prevost's high regard for the Rev. Beriah Hotchkin, A.M., the first American minister and the first missionary west of the Hudson River, and the first pastor of this church, installed January 18, 1793, though he preached his first sermon in Greenville, April 5, 1789", [reputedly at the barn of Benjamin Spees].

On August 27, 1800, the GPC community raised the new meeting house structure, built by Elon Norton. The church was dedicated on September 18, 1801. It's first,



Early-mid twentieth century Presbyterian

and one of its most notable preachers was Rev. Beriah Hotchkin, originally from Connecticut, presiding for the following quarter century (Beers).

The GPC was distinguished as the first American church in the Catskill Mountain region, west of the Hudson River; all the other churches in the area were of Dutch origin.

In January 1859, a fire destroyed the original church structure and in 1860 a new church structure was built and still stands today. The structure is recognized as a fine example of the work of Christopher Wren, a well-known English architect. The church features Greek influenced architectural char-



Caption from 1992 Calendar: The Greenville Academy, left, and the Presbyterian Church stand in stark solitude on this winter day, circa 1895. The Academy was razed in 1905 to make way for the present Library building. Young trees and a decrepit picket fence front what is now a National Historic Register area.

acteristics of Chrystopher Wren Churches, including fluted Ionic columns and a ram's horn capital.

In 1885, the Presbyterian Chapel was constructed adjacent to the GPC to be used for gatherings and prayer meetings. Today it is the Scout Building.

In 1985 the GPC was added to the National Register of Historical Places. It remained an active church until the late 1990s.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the church struggled to manage necessary maintenance of the aged building. Re-pointing of the foundation, repairing stained glass and restoring the steeple were some of the major structural challenges. Through fundraising in the local community, the steeple was repaired in 1991. Almost all of the damage to the steeple had been caused by years of pigeons nesting in the steeple.

In December 2000, the Greenville town board voted unanimously to purchase the church for \$32,500 (Greene County News 5/3/2001).

At the same time, All Arts Matter, a local non-profit organization formed around 1999. All Arts Matter was headed by Virginia Mangold, President and Tony DeVito, Artistic Director. Along with several other community members in the group, they sought to use the vacant church building for diverse artistic cultural events, sometimes in collaboration with the local Rotary Club.

Together with the town, All Arts Matter not only brought new life to the vacant church building (then referred to as the Greenville Cultural Arts Center) with its cultural events, but through numerous fundraising efforts, improved the building by updating electrical utilities, adding spotlights, ex-



Part of the 1934 Presbyterian congregation under the Reverend Norman Adams (and wife Edna [Adams]), on front steps:
 Left to right: Cliff Powell, Mary Carr Thomas?, George Baumann, Margaret Atwater, Janet Roe, Lela Lennon, Ona Wessels, Darnetta Lennon, Norman Adams, Shirley Hook, Marie Roe, Edna (Ingalls) Adams, Harriet Lennon, Roberta Roe, Eleanor Wickham?, Arthur Lennon, Phil Ellis, Randall Cutler.
 Photo courtesy: Ruth Bigelow

panding the stage area, and repainting the building.

All Arts Matter hosted numerous arts, music, and lecture events for many years until the disrepair of the building, particularly the deterioration of the ceiling, made it unsafe for public use for an extended period of time.

In recent years, the town, along with Community Partners of Greenville, has continued to seek out funding to preserve the historical value of the building while also maintaining it for public use that stays within Prevost's deed restrictions of "religious and educational use".

Presently, the stained glass windows are slowly being repaired, as grant funding

permits. Other renovations and improvements are hoped for in the future so that the building can continue to make history in Greenville rather than to merely be a part of it, and perhaps with a name focused on the community.

Selected Bibliography

- Beers, F.L. History of Greene County, New York With Biographical Sketches of its Prominent Men J. B. Beers & Co. 1884.
- Beecher, Raymond. Out to Greenville and Beyond: Historical Sketches of Greene County, Hope Farm Press, 1977.

Removal of bell in 2021



A Continuation

Barbara Walter, Bill Von Atzingen

Deeming the building was not safe to use for events, Community Partners of Greenville (COPG), under the leadership of Virginia Mangold and Barbara Walter of the Greenville Beautification Committee (GBC) of COPG, and William Von Atzingen of CPOG, took an interest in reversing the deterioration of the historic building because of its prominent role in the historic character of the center of Greenville.

Through the GBC, which included members of the Town Board, money was raised for saving the stained- glass windows that were originally installed around 1910, including grants from NYS to the town and from Iroquois Pipeline Transmissions.

Additional money for renovations was raised through two fiberglass duck projects, with auctioning of the ducks organized by GBC. During this period, the renovations included five of the eight windows at a cost of approximately \$80,000, as well as the installation of an emergency exit and a handicap accessible bathroom.

To cure the structural problems with the building due to rot in the beams from leaks, the one-ton bell in the church tower was removed with the generous help of Flach Industries.

Future projects include installing the church bell in front of the building, finishing the small kitchenette, adding insulation to the walls, and finding a sound deadening solution to the live acoustics in the building to facili-

tate its use for music events and other community activities.

The speed at which the improvements will occur depends on the fundraising ability of the CPOG and the ability of the town to gain grants from government sources, along with the town's maintenance department and a volunteer core of interested citizens.

The use of the building as a vibrant community center also depends on volunteers stepping forward to organize events in the building, such as a lecture series, a monthly bingo game, and backup space for outdoor concerts because of bad weather.

In July, Prevost Hall will host an art show in conjunction with an Artists Studio Tour organized by local Natalie Boburka and sponsored by CPOG. Information on events during July connected with that event are detailed on www.cpog.org under the Artists Studio Tour event.

More Continuation – Rest of Meeting [dt]

Part of the meeting was the recognition that the George V. Vanderbilt Town Park is celebrating its thirtieth year. Yes, 30! Already. And who better to briefly describe a park history from personal account than Brian Mulligan.

Brian started with the Deb Magee era, the very beginning, the idea stage. From there, he traveled to the first group of volunteers, on to the second wave that was recognized by Greene County, and finished with a general commentary about what it is today.

Thank you, Brian. And as he spoke, I thought that if anyone wants to provide a community service – a booklet, or book, about the history of our Town Park would be much welcome.

DT note 1: Almost a whole generation has passed since the Greenville Presbyterian Church closed. Many Greenvillians have no memory of it as a functioning church. Twenty years of persistent community efforts since then give rise to new hope for community use of this building. A thank you goes to Audrey Matott for her summary of the history of this building, and to Barbara Walter and Bill Von

Atzingen (and Community Partners) for a continuation as well as their efforts of renovation and re-use.

DT note 2: I cannot help but think of the efforts of Cris (Clarissa) Ketcham to restore and save her church. She practically single-handedly shepherded the effort to raise money and cajole others to help. This determination is found often in many of the places and efforts that Greenville values.

Notes:

The **June 13 meeting** will feature Greene County Historian and Vedder Library Archivist (and friend of Greenville local history) **Jonathan Palmer**. Probable topics will include a 1797 map of Freehold (pre-Greene County), a highlighting of a Greenville treasure or two in the Archives, a favorite topic of Jonathan's beyond Greenville, and a look into the workings of the Vedder Library.

The newsletter is out sooner than the usual week before the meeting. I return from a two week vacation on June 12, leaving me too short a time to be ready. (Some Covid angst is nudging.)

Back to the library. By our June meeting time, my wife Debra's **art show** will be in its last week in the Community Room. I am encouraging you to take a look. There is also a raffle that supports Friends of the Library; tickets can be purchased at the front desk during library hours (winner gets to select any painting on the wall not sold yet).

Bill VA and Barbara W mentioned the **Art Show and Studio Tour** sponsored by CPOG/Arts Around Greenville. More info next month.

A **thank you** goes, of course, to the faithful **refreshments committee**.

A looking over Presbyterian Church photos for Audrey's presentation made me aware of a photo that should have been in a calendar years ago. Its public unveiling will be 2023.

PorcupineSoup.com is still a good source of local news and a sharer of Greenville local history.