

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

March-April 2023, Issue 313

Bryant, Treasury, Marker

Please note the April meeting is cancelled.

Bon jour, from Paris. (April 10)

When I first drafted this newsletter, I started to urge you to enjoy an early spring. But, then, the infamous mid-March superstorm.

I apologize if I jinxed an early spring!

This issue:

Garth: Woodstock
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Finding Woodstock

Garth Bryant

For most of us raised in upstate New York if someone asked us where Woodstock was the first thing that would come to mind was the Music Festival held in Bethel, NY August 15-18, 1969. Others may think of the quaint Ulster County community west of Saugerties that was once home to a number of famous musicians including Bob Dylan and Levon Helm.

On the other hand, if you had asked this question in 1765 you would have gotten a completely different answer. You would have been directed to a tiny village on the Catskill Creek just northwest of the confluence of the Catskill, Jan De Bakkers Kill and Shingle Kill creeks.

This early community was located near where the remains of the Woodstock Dam still stand on SR 32 just north of Cairo. This dam, which seems to be the only surviving namesake of this village, was built by the Woodstock Light & Power Company long after Woodstock's heyday.

How did this tiny village on the very edge of civilization come into existence?

Well, it all happened because of love. A man named James Barker was born in England in 1727. He came from a well-to-do family whose an-

cestral English home and manor was called Woodstock. As he grew older, he became a prominent member of the English Bar.

According to family legend, while doing legal work for a client, he met and fell in love with the client's daughter named Elizabeth Wooer. She was a descendant of the Tudor family that had ruled England until the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603.

Her family did not approve of this match. Against her family's wishes they married anyway in Blythe Nottingham in 1757. The reason for her family's disapproval is not recorded. However, a look at their surviving marriage and children's birth dates seem to indicate that Elizabeth may have been with child when she was married.

This could easily be an error but if true it would have been a scandal and it could have been the cause of their family's disapproval. Whatever the true cause, James and Elizabeth's family problems were severe enough that they gave up their rank, friends, and holdings and moved to the very edge of the English Empire in 1765.

Their granddaughter, Mrs. Cornelia White, years later described their move. "While attending to her father's business as attorney, James fell in love with her and as he was eminently distinguished for his special pleading, he won his case with her but failed with the parents. She decided

however to forfeit her rank and sacrifice friends and all that was dear to her and follow the man she loved... She left a home of luxury and refinement to take up their abode in what was then a wilderness inhabited by savages and wild beasts.”

They brought with them 23 families that had been tenants on his English estate. They acquired 6,000 acres in what was then known as the Durham area. Barker would assume the title of Patroon and would be known by that title the rest of his life. He would name the new community Woodstock after his family home. James and Elizabeth would spend the rest of their lives together at their adopted American home.

At the time of its founding Woodstock was the only settlement in what would become the Town of Cairo. A decade after Woodstock's founding the American Revolution started. Barker did not fight in the Revolution.

He was however a signer of the Coxsackie Declaration of Independence. This document signed before the official Declaration of Independence, condemned the Boston Massacre while at the same time calling for reconciliation.

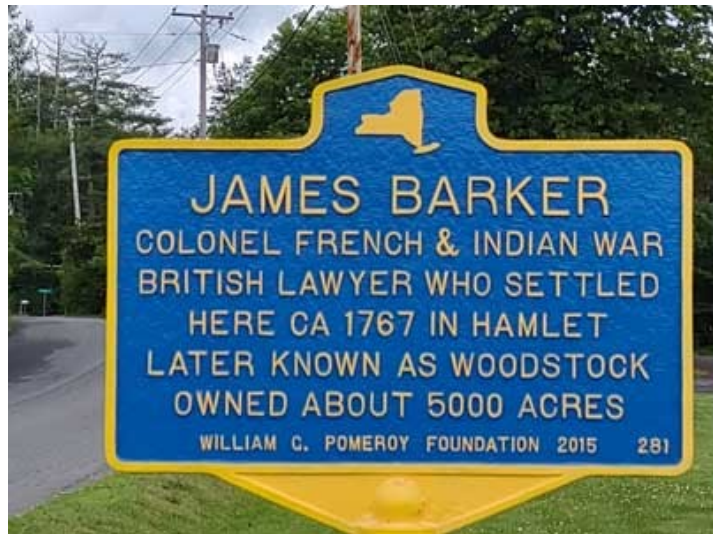
The extremely exposed position of this village put it in threat of attack from the British and their Indian allies. For this reason, Baker buried a large part of his personal fortune including coins and the family silver during the war years. According to family legend part of this fortune was never dug up. The legend goes further to claim that some of the family's missing silver was sold years later in far off Ohio.

Now before you run down there with your metal detector it must be remembered that James Barker died at the age of 93 in 1820. He left a considerable estate. It seems highly unlikely that he left a treasure buried, but who knows for sure. History, after all, is always more interesting when there is a buried treasure involved.

James and Elizabeth raised seven children in Woodstock. One of them died very early in 1767. Their surviving children would give them forty grandchildren.

In 1791 Elizabeth inherited part of her mother's estate. Part of this money was used to buy additional land north of the Catskill Creek. Elizabeth would die in 1796. She is buried in the Barker Family Cemetery located on Frank Hitchcock Road very close to the dam along with her infant son.

This is reportedly not her original resting place. The flooding of Lake Woodstock in 1906 when the power plant was built required the moving of the original cemetery. James is reportedly buried in East Durham in an unmarked grave as he did not want to be buried in the original Barker Cemetery as it occasionally was flooded by the Catskill Creek. Other His-



Barker Historical Marker
near intersection of Edison Timmerman Rd
and SR 32, by Woodstock Dam

torians dispute this claim.

In 1801-06 the Susquehanna Turnpike was built. This 90 mile-long toll road connected Catskill on the Hudson River to Wattle's Ferry on the Susquehanna River via Conesville and Stamford. It followed the south bank of the Catskill Creek for a considerable distance including traversing Barker's lands.

In addition to connecting these two river systems, the road opened up these lands for development. In 1800, in anticipation of the already planned Turnpike, the Canton Bridge Company built the first bridge across the Catskill Creek at Woodstock.

This toll bridge was designed to give farmers north of the Catskill Creek year-round access to the Turnpike. The Catskill Creek was very difficult and dangerous to cross for large parts of the year. All these new roads led to an increase in population and in 1803 a new Township was carved out of Coxsackie, Freehold, and Catskill.

First named Canton, the town's name was changed to Cairo in 1808. It seems this change was necessary when it was realized that there was already a Canton Township in Northern New York.

Back in Woodstock, the original bridge ended spectacularly when in 1810 the entire thing collapsed into the Catskill Creek as a herd of cattle was being driven over it. Reportedly 20 head were killed. The bridge was rebuilt and washed away by high water twice more during the 1800's. It was finally replaced by the much more substantial Truss bridge that lasted until 1977. This bridge is easily remembered by people my age. You younger

readers will have to take our word for it.

Woodstock continued along into the 1800's. In 1806 it was home to a distillery owned by Montgomery Stevens. The Catskill Creek at Woodstock Falls was used for milling purposes early on. In 1816 the early grist mill and saw mill burned to the ground. It was replaced by a woolen mill built by Judge Moses Austin. In 1871 a paper mill was started there. By 1879 the mills were very dilapidated and the dam was almost useless.

A man named Charles Case bought the property and built a new dam. This wood and stone dam was 200 feet long, 30 feet wide and 14 feet high. This dam powered a paper mill that employed 30 men and produced 18,000 tons of fine quality wrapping paper annually. None of these mills were powered by the 30 foot high concrete dam that still exists. The concrete dam was built in 1906 for electrical generation and would serve in that function for the next half century.

It seems that it was the building of the roads and the railroads that put an end to the village of Woodstock. The Main Street of Cairo is the original path of the Susquehanna Turnpike. It quickly became a resting place for horses and passengers. Other early businesses grew up around this stop to service these travelers.

The ill-fated Canajoharie and Catskill RR built in 1838 and the later Catskill Mountain Railroad also ran through the Village of Cairo. The road system and development all seemed to move to this area. In the same manner that later day small communities would be bypassed by the construction of the US Interstate highway system, Woodstock was bypassed. The village of Cairo that hadn't even existed when Woodstock was established grew in leaps and bounds and Woodstock gradually faded away.

As I did the research for this article, I kept getting the feeling that I was reading some 18th century romance novel or watching something on my wife's favorite Hallmark channel. Forbidden love, a young couple escaping their disapproving parents, savages and wild beasts, buried treasure, are you kidding me, this can't be true.

But it seems it all really happened. While there is some disagreement on small details like James's possible military service, the basic love story between James and Elizabeth is agreed on by all known sources.



Woodstock Dam: Twilight Years

Two hundred and fifty-seven years ago two people in love gave up almost everything and moved halfway around the world so they could live together and raise their family in peace in a community they hacked out of the wilderness.

I am constantly amazed at the courage of our forefathers.

Recognitions

I am once again pleased to announce the GLHG recognitions for the next three upcoming calendars.

A strong turnout in voting, and commentary, once again told the story of the people who have given so much to Greenville. Nearly sixty of you responded, a very good turnout. Your appreciation of Greenville area community members covering a wide range of talents is testimony not only to your gratefulness but also to the service and talents of so many "ordinary" people.

To be recognized:

*** 2024 Calendar: Barbara Walter; Jack & Barbara (Baker) Van Auken

*** 2025 Calendar: Don & Debra (Hoovler) Teator

*** 2026 Calendar, posthumous: Dr Anna Perkins, Matt Chesbro, Kathie Williams, Frank Giorgini

Past GLHG recognitions can be found at: <https://vedderresearchlibrary.org/about-the-recognitions>

Notes:

** Included this month was a Garth article that was first published at Porcupine-Soup.com, and too good for you to miss. Thank you, Garth.

** The **May 8 meeting**, 7:30, Library. Featured is Mark Vinciguerra: Publisher/President, Capital Region Independent Media (among them the Pioneer); topic: importance and state of the community newspaper industry

GLHG Treasury

The short story: the treasury is in good shape.

The longer story: read on.

One should not forget that GLHG is a loose confederation of community members, living here or once did, who enjoy or have enjoyed Greenville area life. And when the chance was proffered back in 1989 to form a group to tell about local life and history, a few dozen people jumped at the chance to form what would soon become the Greenville Local History Group.

Interestingly, the ones who spoke up wished not to join another Historical Society with all the rules and committees and reports. Keep it informal was the guiding force then and still seems to be. Note that, even thirty-some years later, we still do not call ourselves a historical society.

Thus, until a large enough handful of committed people decide that a Greenville Historical Society would serve Greenville better, we will continue as a Local History Group.

And that is where we are today. Almost by default of position, I have been designated the cat-herder. Somehow, this independent bunch of cats have been a recognizable force among Greene County history groups. Thirty years of steady effort has produced a worthy oeuvre.

So, what does it cost to keep an organization like this going?

Again, almost by default, I accepted the task of handling any finances. And I liked keeping things simple. It was not until ten years ago that I opened an account with the group's name on it.

The first expense was the cost of mailing newsletters. The annual cost of postage and paper, not counting time, served that basis. And fortunately, I always had access to a copier at no additional cost. Currently, after adding up all the expenses, an annual fee of ten dollars

covers these costs.

In our second year of operation, we decided to create a calendar of local historical scenes. Except we had no money reserve. A dozen people were good enough to "loan" the calendar for that year, and I hoped like crazy that we sold enough calendars to pay everyone back. It worked but it was more work than I wanted to do.

So, every calendar after that, until 2014, Deb and I fronted the money and hoped like crazy that we sold enough calendars to pay ourselves back. And over those years, we averaged out even, with no shortage or surplus. I suppose we could have charged more for calendars or I could have tried to find a different publisher.

Then, in 2014, or just after, two things happened. One, my mother died, with one of the memorial contributions made out to GLHG. The second was Russell Lewis's Eagle Scout project whose fundraising surplus was donated to GLHG. Between the two, we almost had enough to cover the cost of a calendar. The much smaller shortfall again was again fronted by Deb and me.

And then, ever so slowly, with donations generously given, we were able to amass enough money to pay for the printing before the year began.

More contributions, and the last several good years of sales, has now led to a non-interest bearing account with The Bank of Greene County of just over \$4000, enough to pay for almost three years of calendars. Whew.

My name is on the account, with Deb as a second. At some point, if need be, I will be recruiting someone else to be ready to step in. And an IRS filing needs to be done each year, a fairly simple task so far, able to be done online with a minimum of trouble.

I have taken pride that the GLHG, and calendar, has cost the Town of Greenville not a cent – we have paid our own way. And I hope that we have made a positive difference for our area we call home.

**Common Knowledge
Once Upon a Time**
Don Teator

I bet you have had the experience of someone asking you a question about something from twenty, fifty years ago, something particular, and, poof, no one recalls the exact details, even though, once upon a time, everyone would have known.

And so it was when a new project at the Veterans Park (pond) begged for some historical accuracy. The Nov-Dec 2022 GLHG newsletter noted the new Vietnam Memorial, resplendent with the eighty-foot flag overseeing the Four Corners.

My neighbor/friend Tim Broder, who was one of those instrumental in overseeing the completion of the project, asked me an innocent question.

Actually, it is a question I have heard before but no one appeared to be in need of a prompt answer and I knew it would take some research.

The question: When was the park dedicated as a Veterans Memorial Park?

One plaque on a mid-sized boulder says that it was dedicated as such, along with the names of Frederick Flack, Supervisor; Captain Leslie Gumport, Ret; and Wilbur Baumann. No date given. (see Greenville Local photo)

The other plaque on the rock says the park was re-dedicated on May 30, 1988.

The desire to update the plaques prompted Tim's second question: Who was the supervisor of the re-dedication?

I knew the answer to the second question (answer below, in case you wish to guess now).

In the past, when asked about the tough question, I simply said I did not

know and suggested they ask someone in the American Legion. And that delaying tactic has worked for decades.

Finally, and recently, it was admitted that the all the powers that had been asked did not know the answer but they knew someone who might.

The Town Historian!

Now I had a challenge. I felt an urgency to want to see if I could find the answer in short order.

Where to start? What had made this so difficult was where to find accurate sources. Once upon the time, we could have asked some old-timer in town. For better or worse, we are now the old-timers and not a single person has proffered a date without major disclaimers of responsibility. So, my brain goes a-whirling.

I started with a Google search: Leslie Gumport obituary. Nothing. Now what?

Then the idea blazed in the cranial sphere: Capt Leslie Gumport was recognized



Pictured above is the heavy bronze plaque which will soon be attached to a suitable stone probably secured from Vermont and erected in Veterans Memorial Park, on the corner where Routes 32 and 81 intersect each other. The plaque is 18 inches by 24 inches in size and is of very heavy material. The inscription reads

The Greenville Local gives a "Tip of the Hat" to Captain Gumport who "sparkplugged" the movement for the Veterans Memorial Park to be set aside and established. A good job well done Captain, the Community thanks you.

posthumously in the GLHG calendar. Perusing back issues, from the 2002 calendar, I had a year – 1966.

Then, what years did Fred Flack serve as Town Supervisor?

Ha! I looked at the current local history calendar, February, the month of the recognition of Paul Macko's length of service, with a listing of all the supervisors since 1900. Fred Flach served 1964-1968, (Those of you doing the math can figure out this is five years, not a normal number. But that could be another story.)

I was on a hot streak. Fifteen minutes down.

Next, I hoped the Greenville Locals would miraculously have the information. And the historian's files start with the 1963 file. Assuming the answer was before Flach left office (1968), I took the wild guess that the park dedication would have happened before Gumport died.

So, I started with the 1966 Locals, December and planned on scanning the front and back page of every Local, working chronologically backward (a weekly paper), going back to 1964, if need be.

December passed by, then November, and then... , PAYDIRT, the October 5 issue had Gumport's obituary on the front page. It was an answer but it was not the answer to when the park was dedicated.

I kept leafing backwards. September passed. But then in August a photo jumped out. The attached photo began to narrow to an answer. Here was the plaque, waiting to be installed. Still, the question was: who had the authority to make the plaque?

Back three more issues, and Voila! The June 1 issue of the Greenville Local covered the May 30 Memorial Day parade. At the ceremony, Town Supervisor Fred Flack proclaimed the Village Park would henceforth be named the Veterans Memorial Park.

I had my date, and I walked out the library, patting myself on the back and thanking the archives gods for fitting all the pieces to this puzzle so quickly.

In the space of an hour, I had the answer.

**ps: stay tuned for news later this year for more Veterans Park doings.

**pss: (answer to question: Frank Tiberi)

2023 Programming

The GLHG programming for April through November is always an adventure of my ideas, either current or from last year's list; input from you; or some event that invites an airing. Of course, I hope not to experience the couple years of Covid anxiety.

The 2023 GLHG program season, not yet etched in stone, is taking shape.

Thus far:

April — canceled

May — Mark Vinciguerra – the importance of community newspapers

June — Egypt – Don & Deb travelogue

July — Garth Bryant – the Lake family

August — Charles Jesse – Jesse's Elm Shade

September — Linda Mormile – Potter Hollow

October — 2024 calendar unveiling

November — Flip Flach – Greenville Palette – 32N