

# Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

August 2005, Issue 159

Share Session

Another sweaty night faced tonight's attendees: Connie Teator, Dot Blenis, Kathie Williams, Mimi Weeks, Richard Ferriolo, Harriett Rasmussen, Phyllis Beechert, Stephanie Ingalls, Larry & Dot Hesel, and Don Teator. Fortunately, the air conditioning was working.

Richard Ferriolo was the reason for this night's meeting. Although Richard will try his darndest to be as modest as possible, it is my contention that, with very few exceptions, no one has done more over the last ten years to document, printed form, Greenville's history than Richard.

His first work was the 2001 publication of *The Town of Greenville Veterans Memorial Book of Honor*. Actually, it was a book whose idea had been building for years. Richard recalls the Roll of Honor, the board listing all the names of the Greenville boys who fought in WWII, that seems to have disappeared with no one knowing of its demise.

He considered replacing it with a bronze cast but finances precluded that. As time marched on, the numbers of veterans in the town were dwindling. Richard recalled what the town was like during the war years. So many people were called that it felt as if the town had emptied.

Honoring these veterans spread to the bigger idea of honoring all the men and women who lived in Greenville and served their country. Some of these grew up and were called while living in Greenville; some came to Greenville after their service. Richard hunted through the cemeteries and ransacked the documentary evidence. Eventually, the book lists, chronologically by war, the names and branch of service of our veterans.

The book publication process was another part of the production, and Richard especially praised Fort Orange for their assistance. Not to be forgotten is his daughter and wife, as well as the many other people who lent a hand.

Then, in 2003, the culmination of years of work resulted in *A History of The Greenville Central School District*. The November 2004 issue of this newsletter reproduced the table of contents of the book. It reflects a variety of topics – the factual, the anecdotal, and compilations of data.

We took a few chances to digress about what school meant, stories of a character or two, the routine that was predicated upon school, etc. Although not much space is spent here detailing the book, one should not mistake this shortness for lack of interest.

GCS was, and is, one of the major influences in Greenville life.

We took a few minutes to place Richard in some kind of context. He was born in NYC but his family would stay at South Durham when he was six. Later, as a student, he would attend the Lampman Hill school house because his family was on McCafferty Road at the farmhouse next to Dr. Prussner's. In 1965, he moved to Old Plank Road. He served on the school board for fifteen years, as well as his other involvements in the community. His love of family and school and community and country show in all he does.

It is with much appreciation that we listened to Richard explain his two works that will stand Greenville in good stead for years to come.

Other quick notes:  
Richard contributed a copy of the deed that made the Potter Hollow school

house. This school house is now being considered for use by community members in Potter Hollow for a bicentennial.

Richard announced a new project: an extension of the Veterans Memorial Book of Honor to include graduates of the school district (the original was veterans of the Town of Greenville).

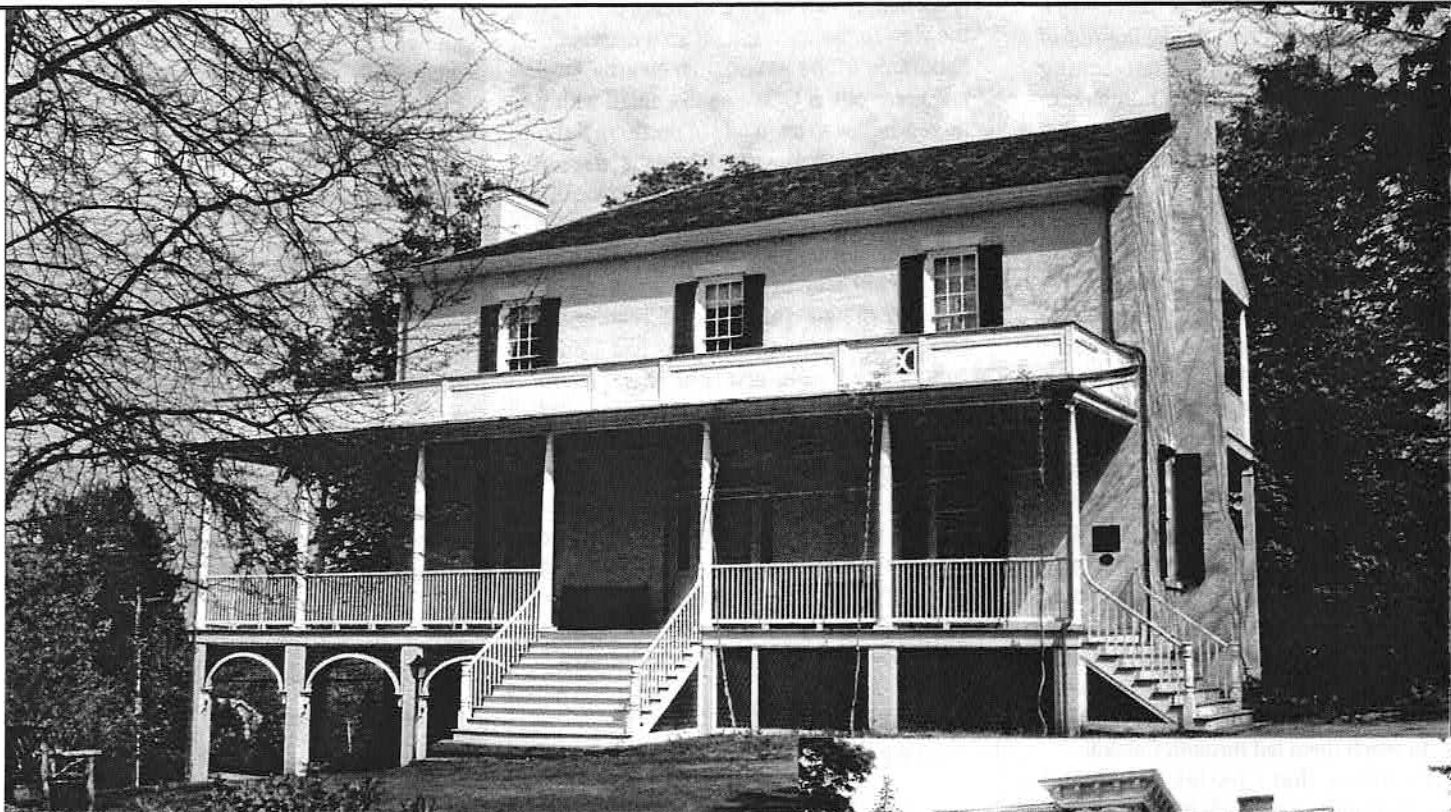
Phyllis, I believe, contributed the Memorial Day, 2005 leaflet schedule.

Reproduced in this newsletter is an article from Hudson Valley, with a nice write-up of Catskill. I hope you recognize our county seat.

The next meeting will be September 12, a share session. I saw a few things beginning to accumulate, so bring them back for next meeting.

Take care,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be the initials 'Dm' or similar, written in a cursive style.



# Best of Both Worlds

Catskill's myriad delights owe their existence to two nearby works of nature

**T**he river and the mountains. These are what make Catskill such a fascinating place to visit. Stand anywhere in the tidy downtown and you can often glimpse one or the other. But even when you can't, you can *feel* them both.

You sense their nearness in the marble facades of old bank buildings on Main Street and the Greek Revival mansions that line the village's bluestone sidewalks. Their presence is palpable in the lofty church spires atop its hills and the still-sturdy remnants of wharves along Catskill Creek. Fortune — and fortunes — have shifted here with tidal regularity, all on account of the Hudson, the Catskills, and how man has exploited them.

Things are on the upswing in Catskill. Thanks in part to Greene County's Main Street Revitalization Small Grants Program, downtown storefronts are getting extreme makeovers, as new businesses occupy

once-derelict spaces. There are a bevy of restaurants and antiques stores (in addition to loads of law offices — it's the county seat). Residential streets have never looked better: like Hudson, the village has been discovered as a second-home haven, and weekend denizens are sprucing up houses at a record pace.

When Henry Hudson's *Half Moon* sailed past the future site of Catskill in 1609, Native American inhabitants thought it was a huge swan. They soon learned otherwise. Dutch settlers arrived in their neighborhood, known as Hop-O-Nose, as early as 1651. (One of these, Eldert Cruyff, was dubbed "Eldert the Thrower" because he could hurl a stone 100 yards.) Thirty-three years later, the interlopers purchased today's downtown area for a gun, two shirts, a kettle, two kegs of beer, and a smidgen of rum.

Although Main Street was laid out in 1773, Catskill really didn't take off until the early 19th century. Two

Thomas Cole's Cedar Grove (top) and another grand Catskill mansion



things contributed to its rise: the realization that the mouth of Catskill Creek was a superb natural port; and the laying out of the Susquehanna Turnpike, stretching west from Catskill over the mountains to America's new agricultural heartland. Statistics tell the story best: in 1787, 257 bushels of wheat were shipped from the creek's wharves. By 1803, when the turnpike had reached Delaware County, more than 50,000 bushels sailed out of town.

The Erie Canal put an end to this first era of good times; it was cheaper to transport goods via barge than wagon. Next, entrepreneurs took advantage of the Catskills' natural resources. Warehouses started filling with bluestone destined for city sidewalks and leather treated with tannins from the forests' hemlock bark. Ice harvested from the Hudson and nearby lakes was also a hot export commodity. At the same time, the village blossomed into a port of entry. With the opening of the Catskill Mountain House in 1824, the mountains became a prime tourist destination, and the quickest way to reach them led through Catskill.

It's fitting that Charles Beach and Thomas Cole lie near each other in the village's Thompson Street Cemetery. No two men were more responsible for America's 19th-century love affair with nature — Cole through his own paintings and his encouragement of other artists who came to be known as the Hudson River School, Beach as longtime owner of the Mountain House (and the person responsible for the hostelry's fabled 13-column veranda).

The Mountain House is long gone, but Cedar Grove, Cole's Federal-style house on Spring Street, is intact and a great place to

begin a visit to Catskill. For inspiration, the artist simply had to walk onto his porch — the view to the west still offers a marvelous panorama of the mountains. Nearby (and just restored) is Cole's studio, fitted with a huge window to let in lots of northern light. Inside is the easel on which he painted some of his best-known works. (One of Cole's large oils, *Prometheus Bound*, is on view at the public library on Franklin Street.)

On your way to Main Street, stop and walk down some of Catskill's residential streets. No town in the Valley has a finer collection of architecture: Federals with exquisitely fanlighted doors, Greek Revival temples, Gothic cottages, mansarded Second Empire confections, and Queen Annes adorned with bandsaw curlicues. Prospect Avenue, which overlooks the river, has the grandest mansions, but any street you stroll will offer up surprises. Also venture into the Gothic St. Patrick's Church, on Bridge

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### The mound of meringue on the pies at Bell's Cafe was breathtaking

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Street, whose columns appear to be made of marble but actually are wood painted to resemble stone. Another don't-miss is the old Christ's Presbyterian Church on Franklin. Its exterior columns, with spectacularly carved capitals, are identical to the ones that adorned the Mountain House.

Main Street has a good mix of shops and restaurants. There are upscale eateries like La Conca D'Oro (for Italian) and Wasana's (Thai), as well as a handful of delis and pubs. Wherever you go, save room for homemade dessert at Bell's Cafe. The mound of meringue on its pies was as breathtaking to look at as it was mouthwatering to eat, and the interior has a homey, old-time feel. Shopaholics will enjoy several large antiques stores, including Swamp Angel, which offers bird decoys (including a swan almost as big as the *Half Moon*) and Townhouse Antiques, whose windows were decorated with jewelry and colorful glassware. Looking Pretty sells women's clothing, while the GCCA Catskill Gallery (run by the Greene County Council on the Arts) exhibits works by local artists.

Also on Main, check out a couple of

financial institutions, both designed by Albany architect Marcus Reynolds (best known for his Delaware & Hudson headquarters there). If it's open, take a gander at First Niagara Bank. Built in 1907 for the Catskill Savings Bank, it features a stupendous barrel-vaulted ceiling. Constructed a year later, the Tanners National Bank (now Trustco) next door boasts a facade adorned with the sculpted head of a bull, the source of its original investors' deposits.

Back in your car, follow Main past Caleb Street's Inn (an 18th-century tavern, now a B&B) until you dead-end at two delightful parks on the Hudson. Catskill Point is located on a spit that juts into the river at the mouth of Catskill Creek. The large warehouse and freightmaster building (now housing a small museum) are relics of the village's shipping days. Today, you'll see

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### Shopaholics will enjoy several large antiques stores

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yachts and sailboats heading into port. The ever-present breeze is a treat during the sultry season, while the views — especially of Olana, across the river — are a delight anytime. Bring a picnic or cop an outdoor table at the nearby Catskill Point Restaurant.

Dutchmen's Landing, due north, features a playground and café. If you follow the paved walkway along the river, it turns into a dirt footpath that hugs the shore. In less than 10 minutes, it climbs wooden steps; turn left immediately, puff up a hill, and you'll wind up in the yard of the Beattie Powers House, a small gem of a Greek Revival mansion owned by the village. You can make an appointment to visit, or you can peer through the windows into the spacious interior, with its impressive woodwork and mantels. A bench on the sloping lawn is a great place to catch your breath and enjoy more scenery before heading back to your car.

In a recent *New York Times* article about Catskill, the author noted that a young Mike Tyson had trained in a second-floor gym on Main Street. He then went on to liken the village to "an aging heavyweight trying to make a comeback after a string of defeats." After an unexpectedly delightful day spent in the village, it looks as if it's well on its way to being a contender again. ■