

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

June 2022, Issue 306

Jonathan Palmer—Town of Freehold

An ample crowd welcomed guest speaker Jonathan Palmer at the June meeting: Bob Shaw, Johanne & Robert Titus, Carolyn Savery, Sue Holmes, Gail Nichol森, Bette Welter, Eileen & Ed Volmar, Jeff Pellerin, Peter O'Hara & John Garofalo, John & June O'Hara, Rachel Ceasar, Richard Ceasar, Audrey Matott, Lori Blair, Charlene & Ken Mabey, Kathy Smith, Barbara & Flip Flach, Mary Lou Nahas, Al Hulick, Stephanie Ingalls, Linda Berger, Frank Potter, Joe Trupiano, and Debra & Don Teator, and maybe a couple more I mighta missed.

It is always a pleasure to welcome Jonathan to Greenville. Although he has the titles of Vedder Research Library Archivist as well as Greene County Historian, Jonathan makes us feel that we are all historians with stories to share.

I think I heard him confess to a little unease of seeming like he had a jumble of topics, possibly making an appearance of lack of organization. Nothing could be further from the truth.

First, when asked what he should do for a program, I suggested a mix of topics – one about Greenville area, one of Greene County interest, and one topic that he cares about or that defines his roles. Needless to say, Jonathan came prepared and was flexible enough to deal with our questions as they arose.

Allow me to start with the second topic of the evening, reminding you how important this background is to understand the first topic (Town of Freehold, 1797)

Take a look at the eight panel photo of the evolution of Greene County (next page). One almost does not need me to explain what happened to our area. Looking at the last panel and then working your way backward, and then starting over from the earliest date, it is an intricate evolution that happened two hundred years ago.

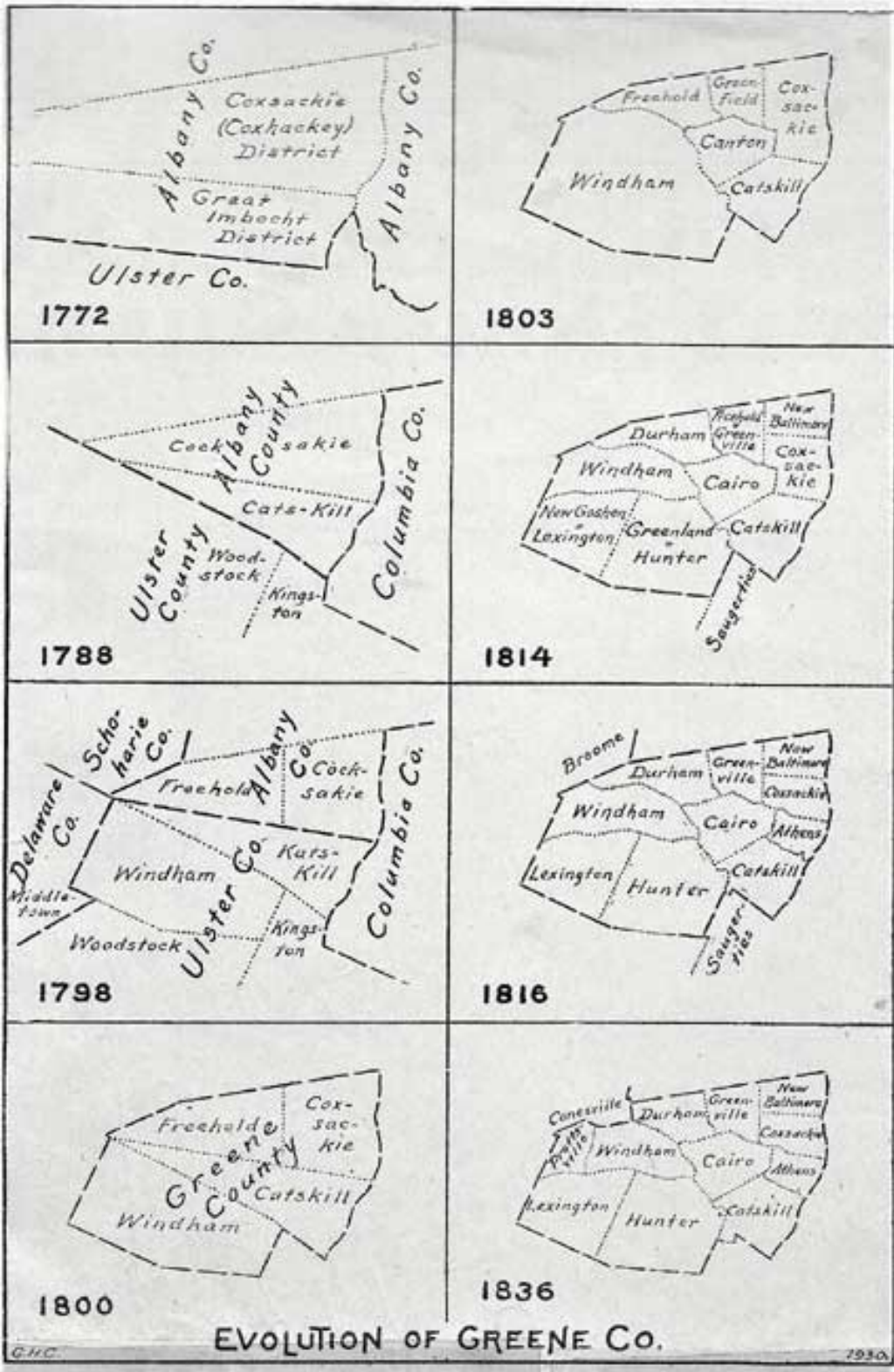
I am reminded of a Sylvia program when she gave the address of a Greenville resident, five different addresses found, but the person lived in the same house the entire time. Looking at the boundaries, one can see why.

Allow me to proffer some highlights of the map photo.

The last panel, the 1836, captures most of what Greene County is today. The only missing names are the Towns of Halcott, Ashland, and Jewett (and the five villages). Greenville is tucked away in the upper center of that map, having that name since 1809.

The most important panel for current day Greenvillers is the 1803 panel. That is the year that Greenville is formed, with the unfamiliar name of Greenfield.

Other unfamiliarities: the Town of Freehold lies to the west of us; Cossackie contains most of Athens and New Baltimore;



The Evolution of Greene County

Canton? the former name of Cairo; and the whole west side of the county are blobs of white space, yet to be defined. The next two panels leading up to the 1836 panel, though, do show the pathway to today's names.

The most important panel for Greene Countyites is the 1800 panel, the year that the county is formed. Previously, what is to become Greene County is part Albany County, part Ulster County, with Catskill changing lines at least once. And the first panel shows no Columbia County.

Any of you who have done any genealogy research, and your dates take you back to these years, will appreciate the variety of names you must meander through to make sure you have not missed anything.

Back to the map: if an 1808 panel was to be shown, the area occupied by the former Greenfield is named Freehold, to become Greenville the following year. So, is Freehold the hamlet at the intersection of Rts 32 and 67, or is it the name for today's Town of Greenville, or is it the name of the larger area of 1798, or is it the name of today's Towns of Durham and Conesville combined? Yes, to all of them, with the caveat of year.

Let's switch to another of Jonathan's topics. He asked if we had heard of Augusta Hallock. We had not, except for the one or two who read Jonathan's blog. He then presented her essay, Valentines, a more complex view of Valentines than we expected someone of her age. Jonathan, in his blog, had presented the essay: Musing of Spirits at the Grave of Ezra Ramsdell, an article you can find at: <https://vedderresearchlibrary.org/gc-historians-blog/2019/10/1/the-grave-of-ezra-ramsdell>.

From the Vedder Archive page, one finds the following:

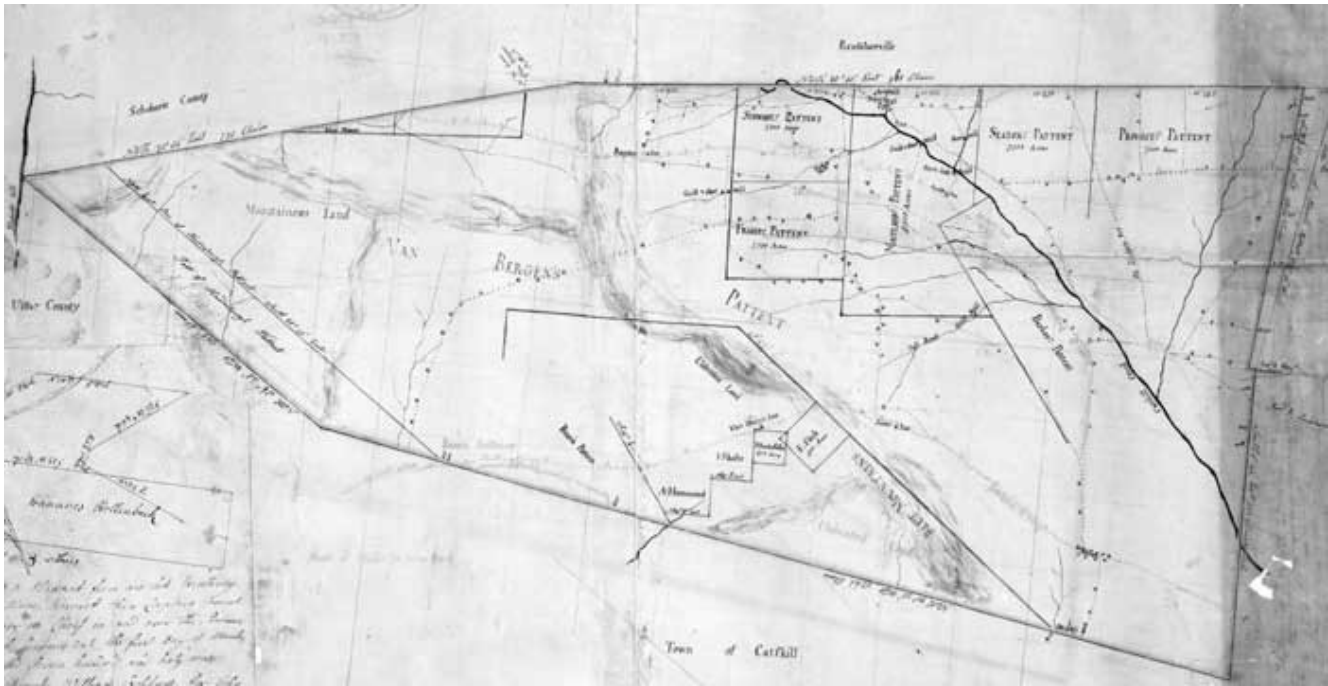
"This volume contains the handwritten compositions of Augusta Ann Hallock of

Norton Hill in the town of Greenville, New York. Entries are ordered numerically rather than by date, and the first two pages of the book contain an index of composition titles. Compositions are in some cases possibly copied passages delivered by an instructor, and in other cases possibly original work of Augusta. The compositions are as follows:

"Valentines; Friends; Composition Day; Twilight; Nothing Particular but Everything General; Leaving School; Intemperance; A Storm at Sea; The Murderer; A Warning; Writing Compositions; Memory; The Life of a Candle; Beauty; Water; Home; Meditations; Twilight Expectations; Beauties of Nature; A Dream; Education; The Discouraged Scholar; Death of Elliot Ackley; Lines on a Bouquet taken from the Grave of Ezra M. Ramsdell; The Contrast; Isaac's Last Good Bye; Lines on my Pink Dress; A Cross Boy; An Enigma; Reflections in a Deserted School House; Another Contrast; Death; A Composition Required; A Comparison; A Remarkable Disclosure; Clouds; A Book Presented; Reflections; A Cold in the Nose; A Reminiscence; Farewell to Our Teacher; To My Watch; Love; A School Teacher out of Patience; First Day and Night of School Teaching; Purity."

A couple of you have asked about possibly transcribing these essays. Please, go for it. I know Audrey was one. Please contact her (mrsaudreymatott@gmail.com) for a combined effort perhaps. And thank you, Jonathan, of bringing to life what would have been another name.

And then Jonathan described the archiving process and the copious material that describes each archived item. I must admit that I heard his words, thought I understood most of them, knew that it took a lot of work, appreciated the help it provides us researchers, but darned if I can put into sensible words. I may ask him to send a summary.



Town of Freehold, 1797

The star of the show, though, was the 1797 Map of Freehold (credited to David Baldwin). It mostly closely resembles the 1798 panel from the eight-panel photo in this newsletter. It would be worth a look back now. And for anyone wanting to download the full-sized map, Jonathan provided a link: <https://digitalcollections.archives.nysed.gov/index.php/Detail/objects/36946>

Jonathan displayed this on the screen and waited for it to sink it. It, at first, made little sense, other than we recognized some of the local place names and also were puzzled by the rest of the names. More importantly, the boundary line does not fit our modern experience. The Town of Greenville currently has a certain shape that that is recognizable from the dozens of times we have seen it. However, this Town of Freehold map on the screen included not only the Town of Greenville but also the current Town of Durham and some of Town of Conesville. The big blocky, left-pointing arrow matched none of our visual memory.

Some familiar names for researchers of older Greenville are the Provost Patent (we

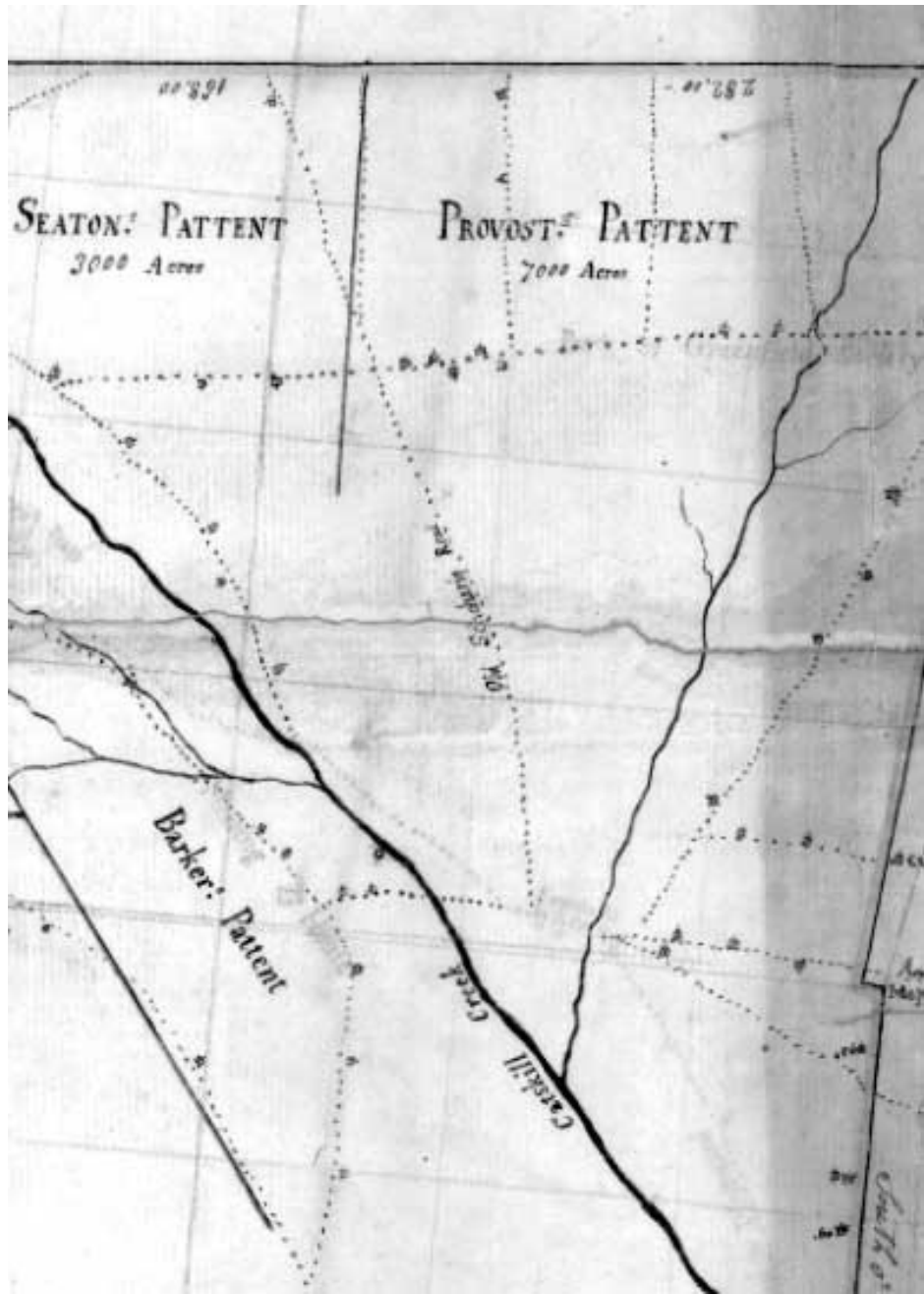
use Prevost), the Seaton Patent, the Maitland Patent, and the Barker Patent. What we call the Catskill Mountains are called the Blue Mountains on the map, and further west beyond Cooksburgh is the vague Mountainous Region.

It should be noted that today's Greenville is noted as Greenfield Society. And that the namesake of this area is Freehold, with the intersection of pathways at Freehold that we know today.

A close-up of the Town of Freehold map is reproduced, narrowing to the current Town of Greenville area. To me, one of the distinguishing marks is the waterway we know as the Basic Creek, unnamed on this map, running into the Catskill Creek, giving me a center of gravity from which to operate. The junction of the two lie just south of today's Freehold

Next, the dotted lines represent roadways.

Freehold first. The two lines running eastward are the roads to the river towns – Coxsackie and Loonenburg (Athens). The



horizontal line approximates what will become the Schoharie Turnpike, today's Country Rt 67 from Gayhead to the Carter Bridge. From Gayhead east, today's road is still called the Schoharie Turnpike. From the Carter Bridge westward (some of you know it as Barlow Bridge, or as the bridge that crosses the Catskill Creek), the road parallel to the Catskill Creek is CR 67 that meets SR 81.

The vertical dotted line running from Freehold northward is an approximation of today's SR 32. Of interest to me are some of the side roads, with some them matching nothing I can imagine.

However, one of particular interest is the road that I think runs along the current day Big Woods Road. It is named the Old Schoharie Road on the map. Reason? I dunno.

In Greenville, one horizontal line runs through Greenfield Society (Greenville),

roughly today's 81 and Rt 26, later named the Cocksackie Turnpike. It appears to me that when that road approaches Maple Avenue area that it might follow what will become Old Plank Rd.

And then there is that dark shaded area on the right hand side of the map. That is the Gore, a section of land disputed between the Prevost and Coeymans Patents. Each surveyor made measurements that, when push came to shove in due time, it is discovered that this piece of land seems to be in both. Eventually it is settled but a section of Greenville and Greenville hamlet are in this shaded section. More on that when Garth talks about the Lakes next year.

Whew! Jonathan Palmer, thank you so much for an entertaining evening. For those of you who are map people, we could have spent a couple more hours.

Notes:

Next program: Flip Flach will conduct Part II of his *An Extended Village Canvas* — his memories of "ex-buildings, ex-businesses, ex-entrepreneurs" that graced and inhabited the roadways a half-mile or more from the Four Corners of Greenville."

The April program, Part I, started on Rt 81 on the western end of town. Flip narrated his memories of businesses and people as we meandered eastward, finally stopping by the St. John's.

The coming program will proceed to the town center and make a short circle around the Four Corners, with North, East Main, and South Streets awaiting for a program next year.

Another note from Jonathan. He noted that the surveyor of the map, William Coburn, did so much work that he may have been the first Catskill 3500er. To belong to this "club," one must climb all 33 publicly accessible Catskill Mountain peaks above 3500 feet tall.

I am hearing lots of news about an artists' studios tour coming the end of July, with a broader display of work of area artists in Prevost Hall and the Library during the month of July. Check online at the Greenville Library, or Arts Around Greenville, or Community Partners.