

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

September 2022, Issue 309

Sylvia Hasenkopf—Mary Ann Wilson, Cole

Once again, showers dared to waft over our heads on a meeting evening. Braving the drops: Bob Shaw, Stephanie Ingalls, Margaret Donohue, Kathy Smith, Anne Foster, Doris Philipp, Johanne & Robert Titus, Jeff Pellerin, Gail Nicholzen, David Tschinkel, Sylvia Hasenkopf, Christine Mickelsen, Richard Ceasar, John Garofalo & Peter O'Hara, Barbara & Clark Ryndak, Linda Berger & Frank Potter, Susan & Peter Keitel, Stewart Wagner, Debra & Don Teator, and maybe a couple that slipped past my memory and my sign-in pen. Welcome to first time attendees Anne and Doris!

Our speaker for the evening must be tied with Flip and Audrey for most speaker appearances! Sylvia Hasenkopf's résumé includes:

- Newsletter #246 (Sept 2015) the Stevens Families
- #256 Know Nothing Party; Saugerties Bard
- #265 KKK; Ephemera
- #274 Greenville History
- #283 East Greenville
- #290 Covid Era Article: In the News (Newspapers)

To re-read my accounts of Sylvia's visits, go to <https://www.dteator.com/glhg/glhg.htm> and find the corresponding number. And the list reminds me to thank Sylvia for her generous contributions.

The two-parter evening started with Mary Ann Willson.

Mary Ann Willson? Who is she?

Except for a letter from a Theodore and a mention in DeLisser's Picturesque Catskills, Ms Willson might have been entirely forgotten. That is until 1944 when a folder of about twenty works was given to RISD (Rhode Island School of Design). And then the backward tracking started, trying to figure out who she was and where she painted.

About Theodore: There has been, and is, speculation that Theodore was a Cole. However, Sylvia explained why this Theodore was most likely Theodore Prevost, a connection to our Augustine Prevost. Even then, Prevost was connected by marriage to the Cole family.

Upon hearing of this woman's existence and background, what has piqued most people's interest is her living arrangement with a Miss Brundage. And the nature of her paintings. Although much of this can be found online, Sylvia has rounded out this picture with research of her own.



The Mermaid



Pelican and Young

“The Artist Miss Wilson and her friend Miss Brundage came from one of the eastern states, and made their home in the Town of Greenville, Greene Co., NY, for a few acres, and built a log house on the land where they resided many years.” (Theodore Prevost?)

Her exact birthplace seems unknown. Even her exact residence of her adult years is sketchy. Sylvia found the following:

The 1820 census for Greenville shows Sarah Brundage as head of household with one other female, both are 45+ years old. The 1830 census Town of Greenville shows Sarah Ann Brundage as head of household, age 70-79 years; also in household is another female age 70-79 along with a younger female age 15-19. No deed, mortgage, obituary, cemetery record or church record has been found for either of Brundage or Willson.

Sylvia’s notes state both Mary Ann and Miss Brundage were considered past middle life. They were quiet and peaceable and respected by their neighbors. Miss Brundage was considered the farmer, cultivated the land, planted crops, gathered the fruit of her labors with the help of Mary Ann. They eked a living on their small plot of land. They never asked for no received charity, but were grateful for all favors and kindnesses that were shown to them.

Sylvia’s slides added a Theodore Prevost note that the women’s “romantic attachment for each other which continued unto

the death of the former maid. Artist was inconsolable, and after a brief time we moved to parts unknown - feeling that the last link was broken that bound her to a solitary home - realizing that being ever so homely - there is no place like home.”

It is the art that is the crux of this story.

Again, Sylvia’s notes: Mary Ann loved to paint and the results of her labors were sold to local farmers in the area for six cents to 25 cents. Not considered art in the traditional sense, Mary Ann's paintings were considered very handsome. It is said that Mary Ann made her paints from natural sources - berries, bricks, soot, leaves with the occasional store-bought paint.

Upon the discovery of twenty of Willson’s paintings in 1943 and exhibition in 1944, there was quite a stir in the art world. Her “landscapes, still lifes, narrative scenes, portraits, mythological themes and genre subjects demonstrated her ability to exploit pure color and design.” According to art world critic, Willson "was simply endowed with a



Prodigal Son



Lovers

teeming imagination, a bold taste for primary color and geometric design, and a total lack of inhibition, a combination which adds up to a style close indeed to that of modern abstract art." This opinion led to speculation that the watercolors were forgeries and the supporting documentation "concocted ... in order to benefit from the growing market for folk art."

However, it was ultimately concluded that because Willson's career was documented in De Lisser's 1894 publication and that the works attributed to the artist were recorded in the collection of Theodore Cole that the watercolors were authentic.

Still unresolved, like much of Willson's life, were the influences, especially since the colors are vibrant. Several of Willson's works are reproduced here.

Sylvia also note two other Primitive Artists – Prudence Bedell of New Baltimore and Ammi Phillips of Colebrook, CT (traveled in CT, MA, NY). Sylvia also offered to lecture at some later date about Olive Cheritree of Oak Hill.

The second of the two-parter was an update of her Thomas Cole opus – The Letters of Thomas Cole.

As if Sylvia did not already have enough "irons in the fire," another of her endeavors, the letters of Thomas Cole project (1820-1832) started in 2018, hit Covid, is now nearing completion, and is anticipating a 2023 launch. Sylvia described some of her travels, her pathway to undertaking this project, a few juicy tidbits, and a promise that our support and/or purchase of the book would be worth it.

From the publisher's website, I have copied the following three paragraphs.

Letters of Thomas Cole

<https://www.flintminepress.com/the-letters-of-thomas-cole/>

"For the first time since the establishment of the Hudson River School of Art more than two centuries ago, The Letters of Thomas Cole, Founder of the Hudson River School will attempt to put in one place the "back and forth" correspondence of its founder Thomas Cole (1801–1848) with patrons, family, colleagues, and friends.

"This series of books by Hudson Valley historian Sylvia Hasenkopf will provide a greater understanding of the man as we explore his passions, his insecurities, and his successes through his correspondence. The books will provide a greater insight into Cole's creative process over his lifespan as an



Sisters



Monte Carmelo

artist; a process that resulted in some of America's most iconic landscape paintings, and in 1825 launched America's first art movement. The goal of this ambitious project is to deepen the understanding of Thomas Cole, the man and the artist, his passion for painting and his life's work—the masterpieces he created.

“For generations to come, The Letters of Thomas Cole will remain a valuable and permanent contribution to the art world as it will bring together letters previously held in numerous archives spanning four states and two continents. A work of this nature has never been attempted. With your financial support, we can preserve a previously undocumented legacy of one of the most important American artists of all time.”

There is a place to support this effort if you wish.

Thank you, thank you, Sylvia for finding time in your busy schedule for sharing another interesting round of topics.

And I have a note to add. I am familiar with Brundage Hill, a local name I learned from the “old-timers,” a spot about a mile north on Red Mill Rd from the intersection with CR 67. On the left in the overgrown brush is an old stone foundation purported to be of the women of this lecture.

2023 Calendar:

The calendar is at the printer. Dozens of hours of cogitation, poring through the photo albums, researching, asking questions from strangers (and familiar people, too), making notes, writing sentences, re-reading, and formulating final captions before accepting the end of another annual effort of a calendar of local history are elements of its creation. I would like to tell you it is a worthy calendar but I am rather close to the project. I await your feedback.

And the calendar is the program for October 10. I will concoct a short slide show of past photos of a certain theme before presenting the new calendar. And I hope our person to be recognized will be present. The announcement will happen at the meeting.

Calendars will be found (I still have to arrange) at the four usual places: Kelly's, Library, GNH, Tops. If there is another place I should consider, let me know.

The price is usually \$10 for each at the business. We will have a special price at our October meeting.

And for those anticipating ordering by mail, \$12 per calendar will cover postage and handling. Checks can be made out to: GLHG, to be sent to Don Teator, 3979 Rt 67, Freehold, NY 12431.

Notes

- ++ Thank you, Stephanie and Christine, for supplying the promised light refreshments.
- ++ October program: October 10, 7:30, same place, same promise of light refreshments.
- ++ Big doings in town: a new Viet Nam Vet memorial, a new 80' tall flag pole with a gigantic flag, and Greenville Day – an event that has grown into earlier hoped-for results.
- ++ It is with sadness that I read David Rundell's obituary this past week. Our sympathies and thoughts go to Judy. A lifelong resident of Greenville, David had a good supply of local history stories.
- ++ PorcupineSoup.com continues to be a good source of local news and Greenville local history. I act as “gatekeeper” for PorcupineSoup, whether the articles are penned by me or someone else, and I will share/have shared them in the GLHG newsletter, with possible modification. And I encourage any, and all, of you to start crafting a memory or story that would remind readers of a time gone by or a good story retold.