

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

March 2024, Issue 322

Bryant

Normally, I would write: Happy Comes in Like a Lion March. But this winter weather allows me to tentatively wish that you enjoy an early Happy Spring! (Should it snow a half-foot after this arrives, you can blame me for the jinx!

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Programming for 2024

Wintertime is that *tabula rasa* (blank slate) time for ideas, with no written boundaries, when the future is limitless. It is also scary because I get to pondering: What do we do this year?

And that responsibility is challenging, stimulating, and a bit intimidating, all at the same time. Thankfully, new ideas keep emerging: several of you have suggested a new idea, or feedback from past programs hints at new or refined directions, and my own predilections come to the fore.

Set in stone are April and May.

Our April 8 program: Flip Flach and Part III of the Palette of Greenville. (see next section)

The May 13 program: Professors Robert and Johanna Titus make a return appearance, distilling the essences of their new book: The Hudson River Schools of Art and their Ice Age Origins.

The rest of the year is mostly set.

- June: Jonathan Palmer, topic taking shape
- July: Flip Flach – Greenville Palette: Part IV
- August: Garth Bryant: the Iroquois
- September: Pine Lake Manor centennial
- October: 2025 GLHG Calendar
- November: to be determined

If this all holds together, I realize, with some chagrin, that it would be the first full season (Apr-Nov) since 2019! Between travel wipeouts and Covid and not having Audrey, every year has been interrupted. However, I also hope that an additional winter newsletter or two has helped fill in the void.

April 2024 Program

Flip Flach

Flip's multi-part The Palette of Greenville has reached Part III status.

Three years ago, Flip concocted the worthy idea of a series of programs he tentatively titled: An Extended Village Canvas. The intent would be to present 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.

Thus far, Part I (Apr 2022, #304) started on the Town's western end of SR 81 and made it to St John's.

Part II (July 2-22, #307) continued on to, and included, the Four Corners.

Part III will start at the Town's northern end, and further, of SR 32 and work its way back to the Four Corners. (I have not told Flip yet but I suspect this will need another evening, probably that July date.)

Thank you, Flip, for an excellent idea.

Timothy Murphy:
Patriot, Soldier, Scout, Citizen

Garth Bryant

Many of us are familiar with the leaders of the American Revolution. We know the heroic part George Washington played. Most know of Paul Revere's ride. We may have heard of John Paul Jones and his famous quote "I have yet begun to fight" in his naval victory over the British ship, the Serapis. Perhaps we may even be familiar with General Nathanael Greene who our own county is named after.

But what about the common soldier? Can anyone name even one?

These men who fought, suffered, and, in many cases, died for America's freedom are mostly forgotten. Yet we in Greenville are lucky because just 25 miles away in the Middleburg Cemetery one such hero is buried. We can still visit his memorial that was erected in 1910, ninety-two years after his death.

His name was Timothy Murphy and outside of the Schoharie Valley he is almost unknown.

The words in the title of this article "Patriot, Soldier, Scout, Citizen" are engraved on his monument. These words, as laudatory as they are, still fall short in describing his service to his Country.

Through his patriotism, courage, and skill, he managed to participate in almost every major event of the American Revolution. Through bravery and strength of character, he did more to affect the outcome of the Revolution than any other private soldier in the Continental Army.

Timothy Murphy was born in 1751 near the Delaware Water Gap. His parents Thomas and Mary had just arrived in America from Donegal, Ireland. He grew up hearing stories of British oppression of the Irish people. Coming from such humble means, he was never afforded the opportunity to learn to either read or write.

At eight years old he was either indentured or apprenticed to the Van Campen

family and moved to the Wyoming Valley in Pennsylvania. The Wyoming Valley was the wilderness in 1759. It was located in the heart of Iroquois lands. Because he grew up in such a dangerous place, he became a skilled outdoors man and a superb rifle shot. He is also remembered as being an incredibly fast runner. He would use all these skills in his years as a scout in the conflict to come.

On June 29, 1775, twelve days after the battle of Bunker Hill he enlisted in Captain John Lowdon's Company of Northumberland Riflemen. He walked and ran the 320 miles to Boston and arrived in time to serve in the siege of Boston. On March 17, 1776, the British were forced to evacuate Boston, never to return.

Following this victory Murphy along with the rest of the Continental Army moved south to New York. There he fought in the disastrous American defeat in the Battle of Long Island and Brooklyn Heights. Washington's army was badly broken and Murphy retreated with it across New Jersey fighting a series of defensive battles until they stopped on the West Bank of the Delaware River.

During this time Murphy was promoted to Sergeant in the 12th regiment of the Pennsylvania line. On December 26, 1776 Murphy participated in the single most remembered act of the war—Washington's crossing of the Delaware. He fought in that night's victory at Trenton and the following one at Princeton.

In July of 1777, Murphy qualified to join Morgan's Rifle Corps. This elite unit of sharpshooters required a soldier to hit a 7-inch target at 250 yards to be admitted. In August of that same year, 500 riflemen, including Morgan's Rifle Corps, were sent to Northern New York to reinforce General Horatio Gates' Northern Army. Murphy was one of those sent.

The Northern Army was there to oppose General John Burgoyne's attempt to cut the colonies in half by attacking south from Canada down Lake Champlain and the Hudson Valley. The two armies engaged in a series of battles around Saratoga.

At the height of the fighting Benedict

Arnold, still fighting on the American side at that time, rode up to General Morgan. He pointed out British Officer General Simon Fraser rallying his troops and shouted, "That man on the grey horse is a host in himself and must be disposed of."

It is reputed that Morgan gave the order to Murphy who climbed a tree, found a comfortable rest, and calmly shot General Fraser through the stomach at 300 yards. For good measure he then shot Fraser's adjutant, Sir Frances Clarke, killing him instantly.

The death of these two officers threw the British into disarray. The British line broke and the Battle of Saratoga was won. Impressed with this victory the French entered the war on the side of the Americans. If true, Murphy's two shots more than any other single act turned the tide of the war.

After Saratoga, Murphy returned to the main army. Along with the rest of the Army, he suffered through the terrible winter of 1777-1778 at Valley Forge where the entire army came close to dying of disease and starvation. Having survived, Murphy was reassigned in July of 1778 and sent to the Schoharie Valley with three companies of riflemen. Their mission was to protect the frontier



settlements of New York who suffered continual attacks from British Loyalists and Iroquois Indians.

The Schoharie Valley was of particular importance to General Washington as it was considered the breadbasket of colonial America. It was supplying around 80,000

bushels of wheat a year to help feed the Army.

Just before he left for Schoharie, Murphy's pre-war home in the Wyoming Valley was attacked by Tories and Iroquois. Three hundred sixty-one people were slaughtered. Murphy probably knew all or most of them. This event seemed to harden Murphy and he would spend the next four

years on the New York frontier defending the settlements there and seeing they didn't suffer a similar fate.

During these years he would take to long-range scouting. He began dressing like an Indian and learned the Iroquois language so he could more easily move among them. He took to repaying the Iroquois savagery with his own savagery. In addition to his double rifle, he carried a knife and a tomahawk.

He would claim to have personally killed more than 40 Iroquois and scalping half of them. He participated in the 1778 attack on the large Indian village of Unadilla following the Indian massacre of Cherry Valley. The following year he participated in the Sullivan campaign to destroy the Iroquois villages on the upper Susquehanna River system. This campaign did much to destroy the power of the Iroquois.

After this campaign, Murphy's enlistment in the Continental Army expired. Unwilling to leave Schoharie, he enlisted in Peter Vrooman's 15th Regiment of the Albany



County Militia. Under this command he continued his patrolling to protect his adopted home.

Patrolling deep into Indian lands meant that Murphy was almost always badly outnumbered in his encounters with the Indians. His stories are full of events where he had to fight his way out of an ambush or flee for his life, sometimes running for miles to escape.

One time after outrunning a large war party, he hid in a hollow log while the Indians camped nearby for the night. After a long night, a very uncomfortable and angry Murphy decided to shoot the last departing warrior out the end of the log and run for it again.

During the Sullivan Campaign, Murphy and twenty-five others were surrounded by more than 100 braves. After two previous failed attempts, Murphy finally cut his way through the hostiles and he and eight others survived. The other seventeen were killed.

In 1780 Murphy's luck ran out. He and Alexander Harper were ambushed and taken prisoner. They were bound and were being taken back to some Iroquois village where the great Murphy would be tortured. During the night the two Americans freed themselves. They hid the Indians' weapons and methodically knifed and killed their captors in their sleep.

These are just a few of the many stories of the dangers Murphy faced in his life as a scout. That he managed to survive seven years of fighting is amazing. That he did so without even being wounded is miraculous. By taking the fight to the Iroquois' homes, he put fear into them.

No place remained totally safe from Murphy and his scouts. Unable to understand the technology of his very rare double rifle, the Indians couldn't understand how he could fire without reloading. When added to his uncanny ability to avoid death or injury, the tribes began to prescribe magical powers to Murphy. This became such a problem that the British put a large price on his head. This reward was never collected.

Later in 1780 Murphy met Peggy Feeck on a scouting trip that passed through

the Hamlet of Fulton. His men soon noticed that most of Murphy's scouting trip now detoured through Fulton. Murphy had fallen in love. When he asked Peggy's father for her hand in marriage, he was turned down.

Despite his heroic service to his country and community, he was considered to be an uneducated man of little means by her father. Undeterred, he convinced Peggy to elope with him. She climbed out her bedroom window and he whisked her away on horseback to Duanesburg where they were married. With the marriage already consummated, Peggy's father accepted Murphy into the family.

Shortly after his marriage, the second defining event of Murphy's military career took place. Perhaps the ever-vigilant Murphy was temporarily distracted by his newfound wedded bliss. Who knows?

Whatever the reason, General John Johnson managed to launch a surprise attack on the Schoharie Valley on October 17, 1780 with a force of about 1,200 Tories, Indians and British regulars. Murphy, after skirmishing with the invaders on the Valley floor, took refuge in the Schoharie Valley's Middle Fort, known as Fort Defiance, with his new bride and about 200 others.

After a prolonged fight the fort commander, Major Woolsey, was inclined to surrender. Murphy, who knew all too well what atrocities would be committed if the garrison surrendered, refused to allow it. Two times the British approached the fort under a flag of truce to talk surrender terms. Each time Murphy fired over their flag refusing to let them approach.

Woolsey then called for a white flag to be raised. Murphy threatened to kill any man who did so. Woolsey then called for Murphy's arrest but no one would carry out the order. When the British truce flag approached for the third time Woolsey drew his pistol and threatened to kill Murphy if he fired again. Murphy reportedly said "I will die before they shall have me prisoner" and fired his third shot.

After that, Woolsey gave command over to Colonel Vroman and spent the rest of

the fight hiding in the fort. The British soon gave up and went on to unsuccessfully attack the lower fort. Without Murphy's steadfastness the Schoharie Valley may today be remembered for one of the worst massacres of the Revolution instead of for its heroic defense.

The day after the attack the Schoharie Valley was in ruins. Homes and barns burned, animals killed and crops destroyed. The dead were waiting to be buried. Johnson had instructed his forces not to burn the farms of the Tories who lived in the valley.

These farms stuck out like a sore thumb in the devastation of the valley. Murphy led a force out of the fort and burned them all to the ground. Murphy always insisted he hated Tories more than the Iroquois.

By 1781 the war was coming to a conclusion. Unwilling to miss the end, Murphy re-enlisted in the Pennsylvania line and fought under "Mad" Anthony Wayne at Yorktown. With this victory the war was over. Murphy had fought from the very beginning to the very end. Yet his fight was not quite done.

Reportedly, on two occasions Iroquois warriors came to his home to try to kill him to avenge someone Murphy had killed during the war. Murphy killed them both. Murphy also apparently wasn't quite finished with his personal war with the Tories either.

It is reported that in a Gallopville tavern during a post war July 4th celebration, some Tory shouted out, "God save the King". Murphy threw the man through the door and over the porch rail, telling him to go to Canada.



All five Timothy Murphy photos—
courtesy Garth Bryant.
Marker on State Rt 30;
Murphy plaque at Middleburgh Cemetery;
rifles and tag at Old Stone Fort

Double Barrel Rifle

Worly & Golcher, Pennsylvania, 1776, .40-caliber

This is the famous rifle owned by Timothy Murphy during the Revolutionary War. It features a flint lock made by the well-known Easton Pennsylvania gunsmith John Golcher. After firing the top barrel, a catch in front of the trigger guard releases the barrels to rotate the other into position. The pan and frizzen mechanisms were removed when the gun was converted to percussion ignition in the 1800s, probably by shortening the barrels.

A page of accounts attributed to Easton riflesmith Isaac Worly indicates he made this gun for Murphy in February, 1776, for £20, equivalent to about \$3,000-\$5,000 today.

Loaned by George P. Wilbur II



Whether these post war stories are truth or folklore, who knows. They do, however, seem a fitting end to the story of his lifelong fight for America.

He and Peggy would have nine children. After her death, he would marry Mary Robertson. He moved to Charlottesville eight miles southwest of Richmondville and fathered four more children.

He would own several farms and a grist mill. He turned down several chances for public service saying "it would infringe on my natural independence." Late into life he continued to enter and win shooting competitions, demonstrating both incredible accuracy and other worldly eyesight.

In the last days of his life, Murphy returned to Fultonham just south of Middleburg and lived there till his death. He died June 27, 1818. He was buried in the cemetery across from Barber's produce stand.

In 1910, on the 130th anniversary of his defense of Fort Defiance, he was reinterred in the Middleburg Cemetery and his Monument was erected. A huge crowd attended.

A few years later in 1919, the State of New York placed a marker on the Saratoga Battlefield commemorating his service. The ceremony was presided over by then governor and future President Franklin D. Roosevelt. In his speech he said "this Country has been made by Timothy Murphys - the men in the ranks." These are very elegant words but I prefer the ones used almost a century earlier.

In 1839, just 21 years after Murphy's death, the Schoharie Republican printed a pamphlet written by a Mr. Sigby, a law clerk in the office of Hamilton & Goodyear. It was titled "Life and Adventures of Timothy Murphy, the Benefactor of Schoharie." In this article Sigby used Shakespeare's words to eulogize Murphy:

---HE WAS A MAN, TAKE HIM FOR ALL IN ALL, WE SHALL NOT LOOK UPON HIS LIKE AGAIN.

Recently, modern "scholars" have taken to questioning Murphy's story, calling it folklore. It has become very popular these days to question America's heroes. I have seen people write that there is no way to know who shot General Fraser. They have also claimed that at that time there was no such thing as a double rifle.

For these experts I have only this to say - read the words from the people of his time that are the source of this folklore. Go see the monuments at Saratoga placed by a grateful nation. If you are still not convinced, take a ride out to Middleburg. Make a day of it. Buy some cider donuts at the Carrot Barn. Visit the site of Fort Defiance. Stop at the cemetery and see Murphy's monument.

But, before you go home, make sure you stop at the Old Stone Fort Museum. For there you will see, proudly displayed, Timothy Murphy's double rifle. Yes, the very one the "experts" say never existed.

The Spotter Shed Lives Again

In the last newsletter, Walter Preisner's efforts to save a WWII Plane Spotter Shed described his journey from finding a building waiting to be loaded onto the trash trailer to resuscitating it back to recognizable existence.

More can be seen on Facebook under Walter's page. Or look over someone's shoulder while they are looking at Facebook. I have also shared Walter's page on four other local Facebook pages.



Prevost Hall Renovation

Prevost Hall, the former Presbyterian Church, is the object of a structural stabilization and reinforcement study. The intention is to utilize this historic building as a working community center.

An early hurdle was the 2023 finding of an engineering firm that structural faults demanded immediate remediation.

In late 2023, two courses of action were bandied about. One pictured Prevost Hall keeping its tower; the second plan would remove the tower to promote safety. CPOG (Community Partners of Greenville), the town committee overseeing this revitalization, is looking for a cost-effective plan that keeps the tower. In the meantime, the study goes on.

The vision for Prevost Hall is to have a working community center that can be used by seniors, teens, local clubs, and more for gatherings, lectures, small musical events, exercise classes and other activities desired by the residents. More input from the community will be sought as this process continues.

Thus far, CPOG has assisted the town by paying for two engineering studies. As you astute readers might have guessed, CPOG is seeking more funding through grants from our state legislators and from application to NYS's Historic Preservation

Agency. And some of this funding is matching, meaning the locality contributes up to half of the cost.

Phase 1 will focus on stabilizing the building, something that might be completed soon. This will allow bidding for Phase 2, a phase that will entail applying for grants, a process that likely will continue through 2025.

As Town Historian and CPOG member, I am readying GLHG's sightline to assist in preserving one of our community's most valuable historical structures both as a scenic anchor of our historical visual canvas and also as a practical and useful community resource.

I will be updating you when news comes in. And at some point, I will be imploring the community to assist, whether it be: Technical assistance; Letter of Support Campaign; Fundraising campaign, including fundraising letter; Fundraising events; Grant Writing; and Making a pledge.

I trust this challenge is one in which GLHG can be an integral part.



Historical Marker Project

Nineteen historical markers dot the Town of Greenville, creating a good excuse for a local history car tour. Which brings me to the topic of more markers.

After the last two were erected (Burr, O'Hara), I was privy to a range of comments, two of them sparking this column.

If I can paraphrase Kevin Lewis (forgive me, Kevin, for throwing you under the bus but it was your good idea), Gee, these historical markers are interesting and important but isn't there something more modern that we can also memorialize?



This marker went missing a few years ago, possibly during a Library lawn project. If you see it, contact the Town Historian.

When I pressed Kevin, and the other commenter, they sagely suggested that perhaps it is our turn—those still living—to recognize those events, buildings, and people less than a hundred years old. And I agree.

So, here is a proposal, one that will be a topic for discussion before the year is out.

We could establish a fifteen year program, one marker per year, spread more evenly across the town than the current situation. Financing is up for discussion, with perhaps a local foundation either shouldering the cost or else sharing with the town. Maintenance would continue to be a Town of

Greenville duty, currently done by the Maintenance Department. (The last fifteen years have seen civic minded community members restoring/renovating/establishing our markers)

Possible examples: The Pioneer Building, The Freehold Inn on the Schoharie Turnpike, Surprise Store, the Drive-In, any of the existing resorts, Bryant's, West Greenville, the corner store and blacksmith shop in Greenville Center, and Gayhead, for starters.

Put on your thinking caps. How about allowing until the end of summer to submit suggestions but I will start collecting them immediately.

The current historical markers include:
close to Greenville (a mile or so)

- Greenville – by pond
- Drake – by pond
- Academy – in front of library
- Academy –square frame, missing from front of library
- Talmage/Atwater –across from Westerner, Rt 32
- Knowles – now located just south of the Drive-In
- Spees – on Rt 32 south of Town Park entrance
- First School – corner of Rt 32 & Irving Rd corner
- Lake – now located on Rt 32, on former Balsam Shade ballfield
- Early Mill – now placed south of Drive-In and Hollowbrook
- Stevens –26 out of Greenville, top of first hill

Newry

- Ely – corner of Co Rt 38 and Newry Rd
- Tannery – near other corner of 38 and Newry Rd

West Greenville

- Manor House – Rt 81, Prevost house
- Aaron Burr – corner of Ida Smith Ln
- Hickock – now placed in front of Lou's Automotive

East Greenville

- Brandy Hill– by Pine Lake Manor, Rt 26; moved for protection

King Hill

- Log Cabin – King Hill Rd, by former Weeks farm

O'Hara Corners

- O'Hara Cemetery

NONE

====Freehold, Norton Hill, a couple smaller spots

