

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

May 2024, Issue 324

No Ice Age, No Art — R & J Titus

A pleasant May evening awaited the 25-30 who anticipated the Tituses: Judy Rundell, Bette* Welter, Jeff Pellerin, Lew Knott, Lee Williams, Stephanie Ingalls, Linda Berger, Paul Augstein, Johanna & Robert Titus, John Garofalo & Peter O'Hara, Flip Flach, Nancy Thackaberry, Steve Tomaski, Anita Orsino, Susan & Peter Keitel, Mary Lou Nahas, Christine Micklesen, John Earl, Karl Anshanslin, Debra & Don Teator, and a small handful that evaded my sign-in list and/or my memory.

(the * is to apologize to Bette Welter whose name I know how to spell but sometimes fail to correct my spell-checker that wants to better my typing!)

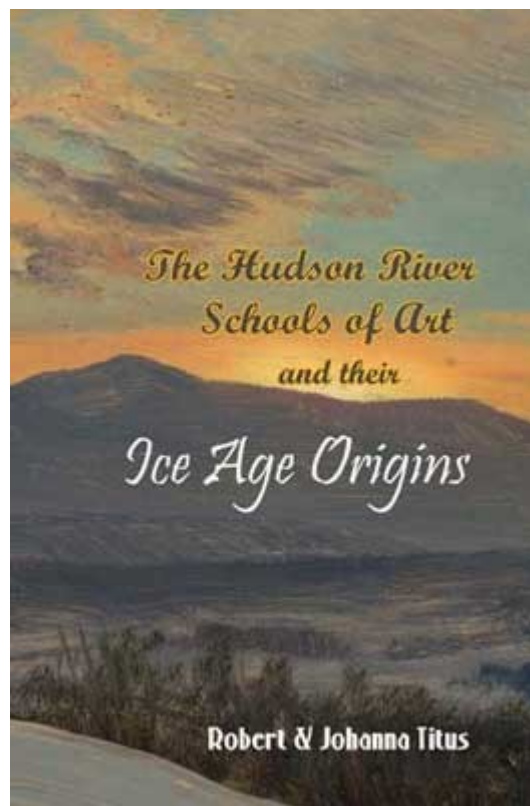
Another of our favorite serial presenters returned once again: **Johanna & Robert Titus**. Earlier programs, one stretching back a dozen years or more, focused on geology in the area and in the Hudson Valley. GLHG thanks the Tituses for the perspective they have brought to us, both in the topography of the Greenville area but also, much more widely, the shaping of the Catskill Mountains, NYS, North America, and even the continent.

This program was geology-oriented but accreted another topic one would not consider, at first. The press release leading up to the program gave a succinct summary:

“The Tituses will argue that ice age history shaped the Hudson Valley in such a scenic fashion that it led to the inspiration of much of the Hudson River School of Art, the birth

of landscape architecture in America, and much of America's early literature. In short, the Tituses argue that almost all of our Hudson Valley culture was inspired by ice age events.”

And at least a half-dozen times, the Tituses had choreographed a chant – “No Ice Age, No Art” (or Paintings). The slogan not only emblemized a theme but also marked the lead-in for their next sub-topic.





Robert & Johanna Titus

This evening, the Tituses featured their newest book: *The Hudson River Schools of Art and their Ice Age Origins*.

The Preface indicated the groups of readers the Tituses were trying to attract. The first were the usual readers – the wide conglomeration that the Tituses’ “popular science writing” appeals to. Those with little knowledge of geology will easily grasp many of the concepts put forth while the more veteran readers who have gathered a good base of scientific knowledge can make new connections.

The second group was the suspected audience – professional geologists, the world in which Robert lived his working career. He has noted that some of this crowd will sniff their noses at his populist approach but the hard science is still good.

The third group was the art historians and those interested in art history, an unlikely

group. The two worlds of art and science are often divorced in our modern world but the new book is turning some heads. And the Tituses have worked closely with Olana and the Thomas Cole House.

The fifteen page Introduction gave, as the section title suggested, a lead-in to the book’s themes.

The extent of the most current Ice Age, some 15,000 years ago, was a major shaper of our landscapes. Throw in some world history and European literary strands and one has the making of the discovery and renaissance of the Hudson Valley, as well as other parts of our country.

Three major categories comprise the structure of the book.

The first is Landscape Art. This, the Tituses concede may puzzle some people, knowing the connection between geology and art is tenuous, at best, in many minds. They made it clear that they intended to show how the artists used the geologic formations for their painting and that many of them were aware of the science. No Ice Age, No Art is wafting in our ears.

The second strand is Landscape Architecture. The confluence of the Romantic Movement and the effects of the glaciers have led to the construction of the Grand Estates we still visit today.

The third strand, Landscape Literature, formed one of the early genres of early American literature, with one emphasis placed on our Hudson Valley. The audience this evening, and we readers, would recognize so many of the writers the Tituses list.

All of this book description fails to capture some of the other essences of the program.

From my perspective, the Tituses wove a masterful account of two disparate bodies of knowledge into a cohesive unified story. And Robert & Johanna alternated the narration every one to two minutes – Johanna

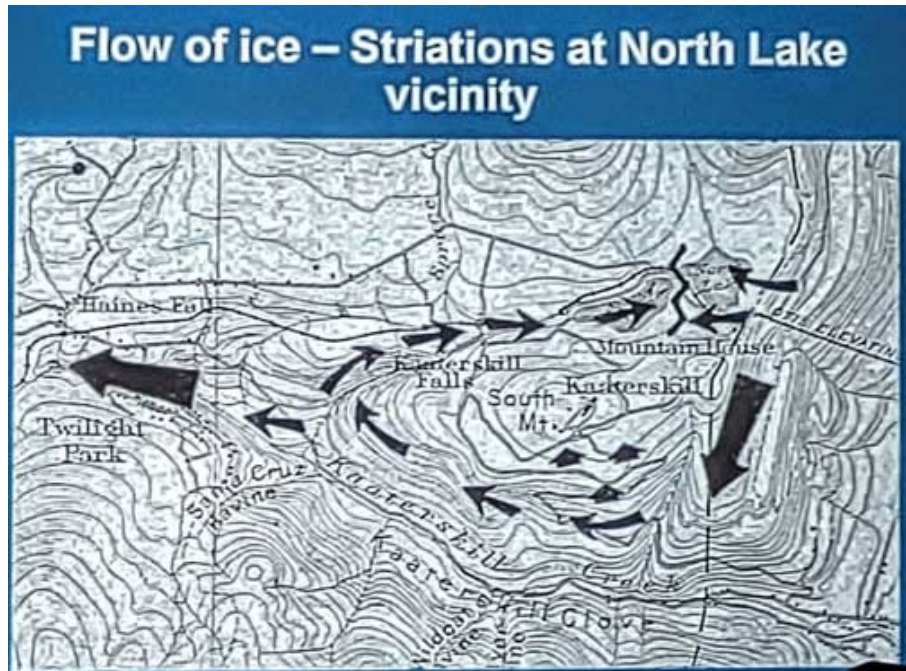
often the voice of art, Robert the voice of geology. The parallels of voices and subject material was smooth and effective.

The Tituses had striven to identify the very spot the artist sat or stood while painting their world famous art. Time and time again, they showed the painting, then the current-day spot, and the degree to which we could recognize the spot. So many times, we too recognized the site. And sometimes, we accepted artistic license whether it was very close or if it seemed to be deliberately re-staged.

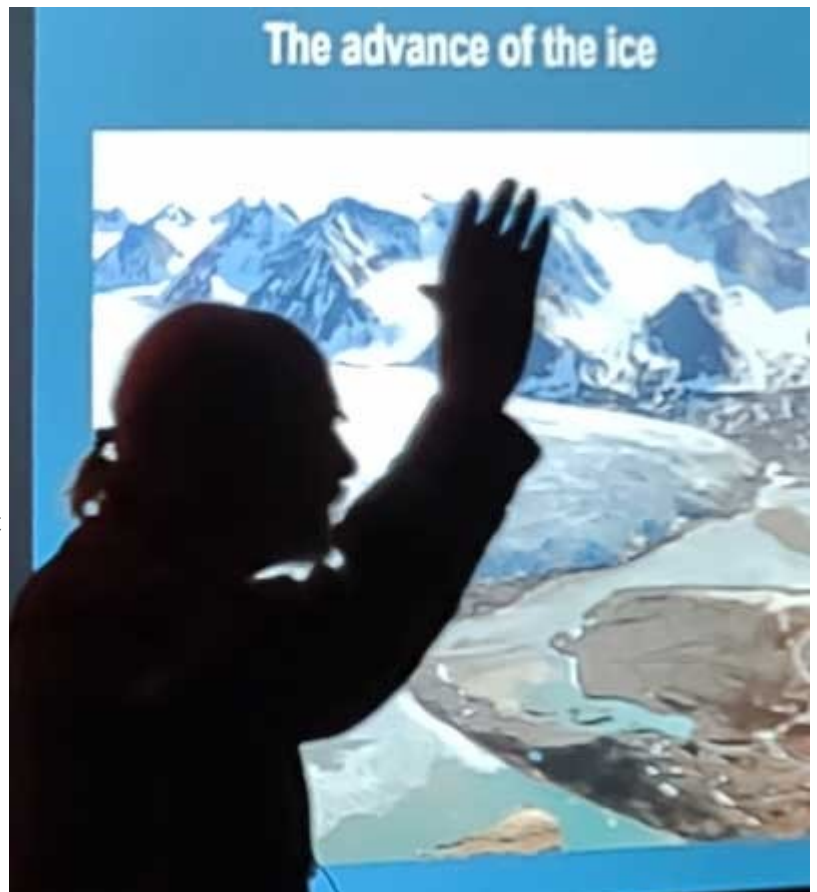
The pattern was set – the slide showed the painting, then the Titus current-day photos. Whether it was Sanford Robinson Gifford’s Ledge on South Mount, or Thomas Cole’s Lake with Dead Trees or Frederick Church’s South Lake or Jasper Cropsey’s Catskill Mountain House, the audience could not help but be moved that we, too, could view from the same view angle what a world famous artist had painted a century and a half, or more, ago. And that we could go see it for ourselves today.

Robert spent some time describing one particular glacial action. The glacier that rose over the Escarpment moved into what is now the North & South Lake Campground area. Facing an obstacle, the glacier went around it and then circled back on itself, creating a circular journey. To prove his point, Robert had earlier reminded us about glacial striations, the scratch marks carved into bedrock as the glacier ground its way onward. The circular route is verified by the angles of the striations.

One painting, or actually the series of them, Thomas Cole’s The



Quintessential Robert Titus holds back the glaciers with a waving of his hand. The gesture is also used to point to the thousands of feet of ice above us, or the thousands of feet below the surface of a tropical sea Greene County was under.



Vroman's Nose



Course of the Empire, had mystified viewers forever. It was assumed that the scour and pluck action showing in the mountain in the Course of the Empire – The Pastoral State, with one long gradual slope and one steep sides slope on the other side, had to be somewhere in Europe. However, no one could find it.

The Tituses, and many of us, surmised it might be Vroman's Nose in Middleburgh; it fit the profile so well. Robert & Johanna have gone out on a limb to claim Cole had visited Vroman's Nose recently before his series of paintings and thus may have used it in his paintings. The Tituses have said no one is denying the possibility and some may even be accepting.

Another key piece of the Titus presentation was the effect the Ice Age had on architecture.

One obvious example is the building of estates and hotels near precipices or grand views. The Catskill Mountain House is

our most famous local example. And any drive leading to the mountains and through the mountaintop reveals a plethora of grand examples, whether still existing or now artifacts in our local history photo catalogues.

The less obvious example is the effect of Glacial Lake Albany. This lake formed upon the retreat of the glacial, leaving a dam and a large body of water. In this case, the lake stretched a long section of the Hudson River.

Today, the edge of that lake, now elevated above the Hudson River, became the building site of our Great Estates that many of us know about and have visited: Clermont, Wilderstein, Montgomery Place, Blithewood, and more. Others, like the Vanderbilt Mansion and Springwood (FDR home) occupy deltas leading into Glacial Lake Albany.

There is more but this short (perhaps not concise) view, I hope, gives a reason to attend one of the nearly two dozen programs

Lake with dead trees Cole, 1825



the Tituses will present this year. (Robert's email is below). Missing from this write-up is the entire section of literary efforts! (my apologies)

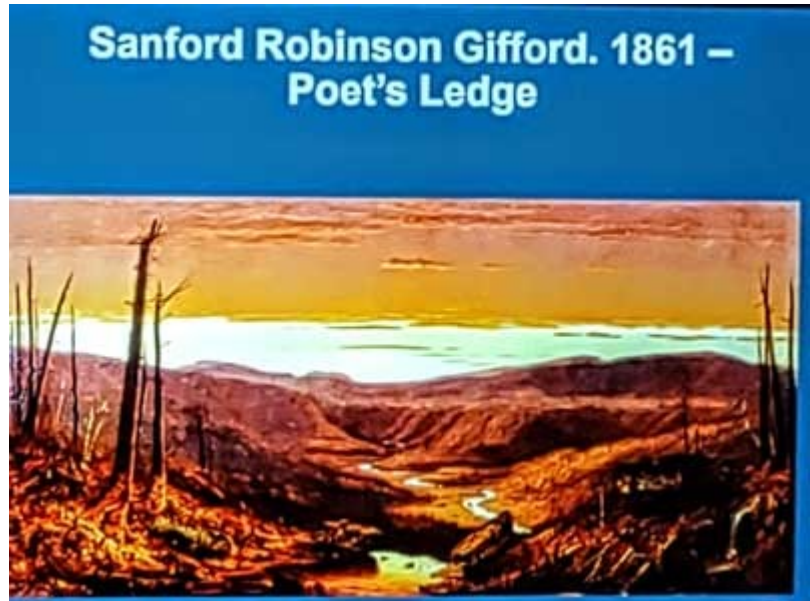
Better yet, purchase the book and use it for some day-tripping and Google-searching for the next few years.

Those of you wanting to purchase the book:

online: go to NYSbooks.com

email for directions how to purchase: TitusR@hartwick.edu

I pray I have done some justice to the Titus program. If not, I will allow either or both of them to reply in the next newsletter!



Paul's Tavern Response

Flip Flach's April program aroused some dormant memories of the stretch of Rt 32 from Wheel Inn to Bryant's.

One of these was of Paul's Tavern, an establishment that many remembered being there but almost no one had significant details to flesh it out.

However, I did receive an email from Tim Adams, and his account is below. Thank you, Tim, for sharing.

So having been asked to share some thoughts and memories of Paul's Tavern, I have spent some time racking my elderly brain for those memories.

I suddenly realized why I was having so much trouble! The summer of 1966 was 58 long years ago!

However, a few disjointed recollections follow.

That summer I spent, often with my close cousin Stan Ingalls, late nights at Paul's Tavern listening to a band called the "Kavoodah men" [sp?}. I became sort of friends with some of the band members - Peter Young from Potter Hollow, Dana Groff, Vinny Rizzo and Harry ?.

My older brother Noel took cover charge earlier in the summer and then I took over.

Checking ID to make sure everyone was at least 18 and taking cover charge and after the band was done sometimes going to Pete's house for an after party. Then starting at 8 am working at my grandfather's lumber co, GNH. UGH! To be young again!

An aside story.

One of my original partners in the Catskills Family Institute, Tom Lund was a drummer in a band when he was in undergraduate school at Oneonta State. He played in a group called The Trip which had two members from the Kavoodah men, Dana and Vinny.

A small world, but also indicative of how live bands were so prevalent in the 60's and 70's. The Cabins, the Kilcar also had live bands as well as others in Cairo, Catskill and the mountain top.

Paul's Tavern itself was, even in the mid-60s, a rather old, somewhat dilapidated building, with the odor that goes with it. Obviously, not originally a tavern, it had an uneven and squishy floor, but an ambience conducive to drinking and dancing. For a few short years it was one of the places to go!

Jo Schermer Remembered

The April issue noted the passing of two community members. A half-hour after sending out my email, I became aware of Jo Schermer's passing.

An hour after I sent the April newsletter email, I saw notice of Jo Schermer's passing. An hour later, I received the following Craig Schwab, author of *A History of Pine Lake Manor and America: 1924-2024*. Thank you, Craig.

... She (Jo Schermer) had turned 106 years old in March of this year. In my book, I mention Mrs. Schermer's pioneering spirit and vitality as a member of the community for over 100 years.

Sadly, her passing in the Centennial year that celebrates PLMs 100th Anniversary is a valuable reminder of the legacy her life represents for Greenville. Having had the opportunity to sit and speak with her in October 2023, I was in awe of her embrace of all things that happened to her during her lifetime. And she

did so with a smile and energetic voice not found in many half her age.

The hundreds of people who will vacation this year at PLM will most certainly remember her as a kind and caring woman. During my interview with her, several times she did not hesitate to mention her appreciation for the community at large and her love of family.

Few times in our life, do we get to know how much was involved with getting to where we are today, as a member of a vacation group, a visitor to a community or as citizens of our great country.

After meeting with Mrs. Schermer, I was reminded of all of these things. Certainly, such individuals warrant praise and accolades for such lifetime achievements. When reaching a certain age in America today, it is important to realize life as a celebration. The years spent as a member of a family, in a community brings about a certain degree of appreciation for the everyday experiences of daily living...

June 2024 GLHG Meeting

Join **Greene County Historian Jonathan Palmer** for a lecture celebrating the story of the **Catskill Mountain House**. Learn about the famous hotel that shaped the way America saw itself, from its unlikely origins in the early 1820s to its tragic decline in the mid-20th century. On the 200th anniversary of its construction, attendees will get to contemplate what the Mountain House represented, who it represented, and how the phenomenon it started continues to shape our relationship to the natural world

Little Red Schoolhouse

I had the pleasurable opportunity to present a program for The Little Red Schoolhouse of Coeymans Hollow, a local gem of a historic one room school house that fortunately has enough supporters to keep it open. And I had wonderful presentation partner. Here is the program:

Join Municipal Historians Don Teator and Jon Palmer for a presentation on the rise of the resort industry in the Northern Catskills, with a secondary focus on the golden age of resorts in Greenville. Attendees will have the opportunity to hear some of the rich history of the region that became America's first mountain getaway and how this phenomenon became a vital and deeply rooted economic engine that survived to the end of the 20th century. Questions, discussion, and fond recollections will be welcomed

