Time and the Valleys MUSEUM & Lost Catskills Farm

CONNECTING WATER, PEOPLE AND THE CATSKILLS

News From Time & the Valleys Museum #2

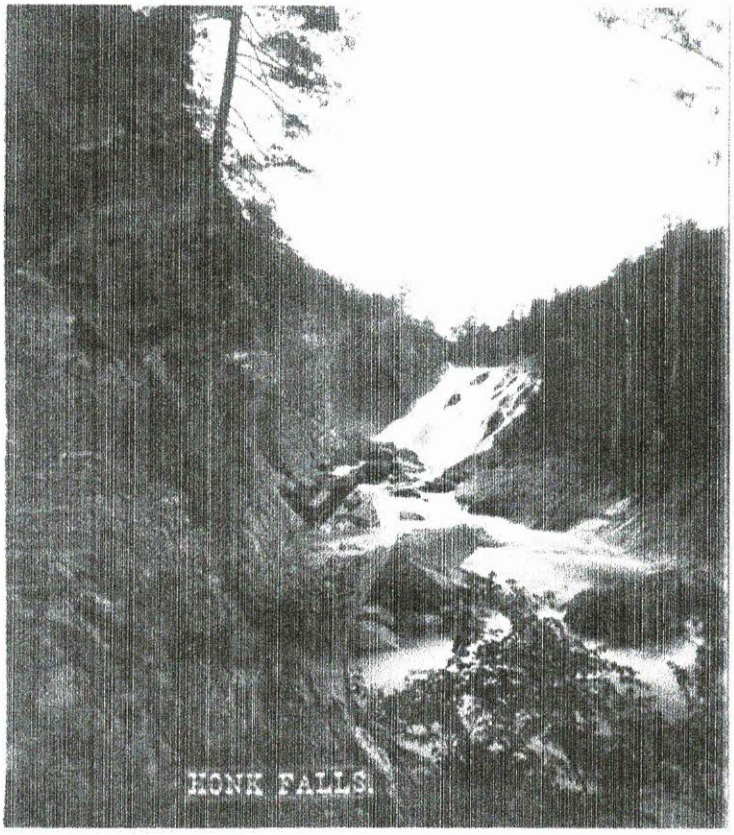
Lynn M. Priebe

The new exhibit of the Time & the Valleys Museum, due to open this season in conjunction with the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, is focused on the role that our area played in the war that created our nation. The exhibit will highlight life on the frontier as experienced by Native Americans and the earliest European settlers, as well as the places and events that played a part in the 8 year long war.

This week the topic of the early routes which crossed the watershed area will be covered. As these routes were important then, many continue to be important in the present day because they became the footprints of later roads.

The earliest routes were those used by Native Americans, often located near the streams that crossed the area, as well as the portages that linked those waterways. Some of the important waterways of our area that were part of trails were the Rondout, The Chestnut Creek and its tributary the Pepacton, the Neversink, the Willowemoc, the Beaverkill and the Delaware. Each of these became important parts of the Native trail that is known as the Sun Trail because it crossed Neversink and Rockland in an east west direction, as did the sun each day. The trail was used in the early years of the 18th Century by the Lenni-Lenape Natives who were occupants of northern New Jersey, the lower Hudson River Valley and the Catskill Mountains. It connected settlements and provided routes used by hunting and fishing parties or those engaged in trade.

During the wars of the 18th Century and especially the American Revolution which began in 1775, the function of the trails changed. They became the paths taken by raiders to attack the frontier settlements of the early county of Ulster, of which Sullivan County was a part, and to return to their home bases. Most of the Lenni-Lenapi had by this time been forced out of the area by the more powerful Iroquois and many of the European settlers had also deserted their isolated homesteads for the safety of larger defended communities along the Minisink Road or the Hudson River.



The route of the Sun Trail can be approximated today using accounts that appeared in the Clinton Papers, a primary source describing the events of the war sent to New York's first governor George Clinton by his military commanders, including Colonel John Cantine of the 3rd Ulster County Militia, and in letters sent by the Governor to General George Washington. Our research staff at the museum has been pouring through these sources to help us tell as accurate a story as possible in our new exhibit.

In the east the trail begins as a route connecting with the Minisink Trail (Route 209) in Wawarsing and follows the Rondout to the west as it climbs hills near Napanoch to reach the site of Honk Lake and Falls. It then parallels the Rondout through the valley now covered by the Rondout Reservoir to the place where the Chestnut Creek flows into that stream. It continues through Grahamsville to the small settlement of Unionville where it leaves the Chestnut to follow the small Pepacton Brook over Wildman or Wyman Hill to Halls Mills, the site of a ford crossing the Neversink River. The ford is close to the covered bridge and the eastern end of Hunter Road.

The rest of the trail through northern Sullivan County roughly follows the route of what was later to become the Hunter Road built in the early 1800's by John Hunter who was married to the granddaughter of Elias Debrosses, an early owner of Lot # 5 of the Hardenbergh Patent. It crosses the Willowemoc, passes through Brown settlement and crosses the upper Mongaup, then makes its way to Shin Creek (Lew Beach) and follows the Beaverkill to its junction with the Delaware.

After leaving Sullivan County it is thought to have followed the Delaware and continue to the west to reach the Susquehanna River which was the location of Oquaga, the home base used by Joseph Brant's Natives and their Loyalist allies during the American Revolution.

There were other trails which intersected with the Sun Trail. One left the Rondout near what was later Montela and passed south of Thunder Hill, through the original Neversink village, on to the Blue Hills (Liberty) and eventually to the Cushetunk settlement on the Delaware. Another trail followed the East or Pepacton Branch of the Delaware upstream to three Native settlements that were later occupied by settlers from the Kingston area during the years of the Revolution.

The existence of these early trails was what brought the events of the American Revolution to the northern Sullivan County area. Both sides used the trails, both sides knew the other side would move from east to west on them. As a result, the story of the frontier war of the American Revolution can be told by events along trails such as the Sun Trail.

CONNECTING WATER, PEOPLE AND THE CATSKILLS

News From Time & the Valleys Museum #3

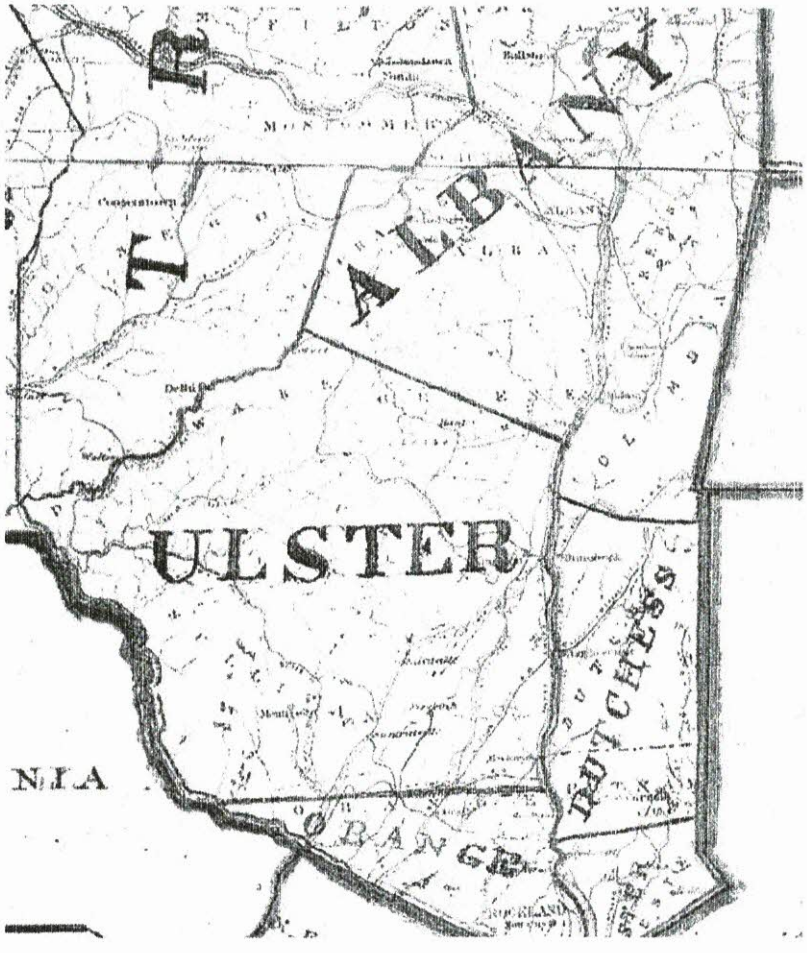
Lynn M. Priebe

Time and the Valleys MUSEUM & Lost Catskills Farm

What was life like on the frontier at the time of the American Revolution? That question is one we at Time & the Valleys Museum have been researching to develop our new exhibit opening this season.

Sullivan County was definitely the frontier at that time and was not yet a county, but rather part of Ulster County. Ulster included the settlements in the Hudson River Valley and extended west to lands reserved to the Native Americans by the Fort Stanwix Line agreed upon by the British and Natives in 1768 after the close of the French and Indian Wars. Nearest to what is now Sullivan County, part of the line followed the west branch of the Delaware River.

There were settlers in the area at the time. They had come in the early 1700's to claim parcels in land that had been granted by the British government. There were numerous land grants that included Sullivan County land. The two most important to our story were the Rochester and Hardenbergh Patents. Both were formalized during the reign of Queen Anne. The Rochester Patent in 1703 and the Hardenbergh Patent in 1708 overlapped and included some of the same land. The earliest settlers most likely obtained rights to settle under the Rochester Patent, since the Hardenbergh lands were not finally surveyed and available for transfer until midcentury.



The Native American trails were natural routes to move into the area. The Sun Trail along the Rondout Creek, though not wide enough to accommodate wheeled vehicles, was a primary route west. Settlers in what would become Neversink and even some of those heading to the Delaware to settle used it.

The history of these early settlers is obscure. Some records have been found that include names, but most of these hardy pioneers are unknown. They established self-sufficient homesteads and raised families in the valley, despite extreme hardship. There were no close neighbors, no schools or stores, no doctors and many dangers. Wild animals, including wolves, bears and panthers, threatened the settlers, their crops and their livestock. Native Americans in the area also posed a danger. Extreme weather, a late frost, droughts or floods could end their attempt to survive in the wilderness. One crucial need was a place to have their grain turned into flour. The nearest early grist mill was that of Cornelius Vernooy built very early in the 1700's, which used the power of the Vernooy Kill, and was located in Wawarsing, along the Old Mine or Minisink Road (Rt. 209). Farmers from many miles away would travel with their grain and wait for hours as it was ground into precious flour to meet their needs. Another important type of mill using water power not readily accessed, was the saw mill. Until sawed lumber was available, homes had to be constructed of logs.

An early settler of the valley was Pieter Louw (Low, Lowe) who settled above Honk Falls along the upper Rondout in a place called Ragawack (perhaps a version of Lackawack) in 1708. He was the first of a large family. Lows Corners takes its name from members of his family. Other family names that predate the American Revolution are Hornbeck and Klyne. Many of these families left in the early 1770's and did not return until after the war had ended. Those who stayed suffered greatly during the war years.

Our exhibit will let the visitor experience this early time. The dark forests of the frontier inhabited by animals, the lives of Native Americans and the early settlers and the war that tore that world apart will be presented. We invite you to join us in May to learn more about the frontier of 250 years ago.

CONNECTING WATER, PEOPLE AND THE CATSKILLS

News From Time & the Valleys Museum #4

Lynn M. Priebe

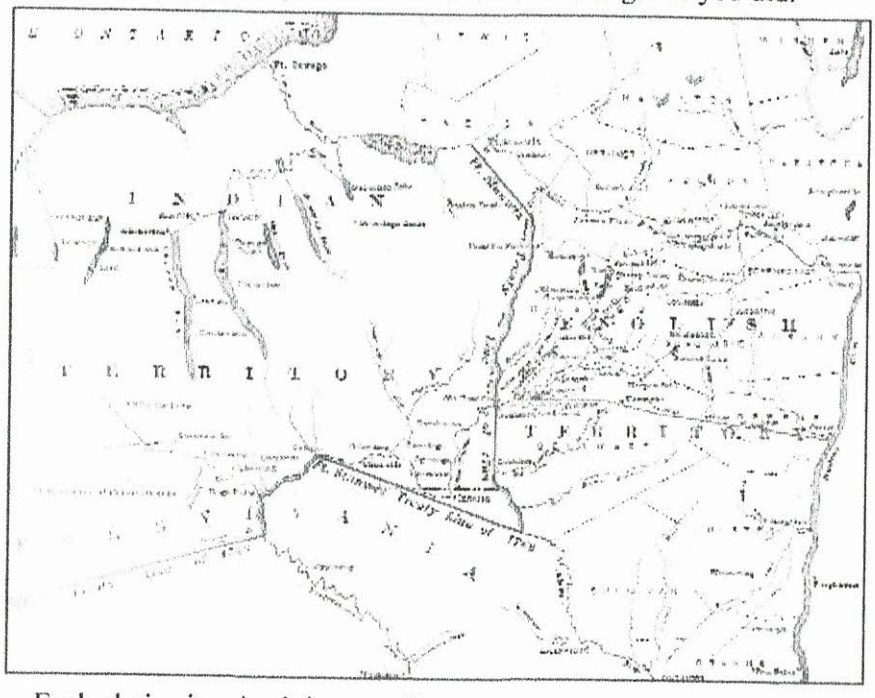
Time and the Valleys MUSEUM & Lost Catskills Farm

Which side are you on? This question is one the museum addresses in our traveling exhibit which will move around the county this year in conjunction with the Sullivan County Semiquincentennial Commission's celebration of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution. We will also be concerned with the same question in our new exhibition at the museum.

At the outbreak of war around Boston in 1775 people living in the American colonies were forced to choose where their loyalties would lie. It was not a simple choice and more difficult in areas that were the dividing lines between British held land and those controlled by the new 13 states.

New York State was a particularly difficult place for those who lived there. For most of the war, New York City, the rest of Manhattan Island, Long Island and Westchester County were under the control of the British Army. The Hudson River - Lake Champlain corridor was of such importance as the "key to the continent," that armies were continually moving back and forth on its waters. And then there was the powerful Iroquois Confederacy as well as other Native groups of western New York, centered in the Susquehanna and Mohawk River Valleys and the Finger Lakes region. Land had been reserved to Natives according to the Fort Stanwix Treaty agreed upon between the British government and the Native Americans in 1768.

Located between these powerful forces were the frontier areas of Orange and Ulster Counties, parts of them populated with small farming communities that could provide important food and livestock to the opposing sides. It was natural that they would be sites of conflict. A side must be taken or one would be the enemy of all - that a far greater danger than declaring where you stood and enjoying the protection of those who thought as you did.



Neversink, then part of Rochester in Ulster County and Denning, part of Shandaken, were both sparsely populated. Though many settlers removed from this dangerous frontier area and did not return or settle until after the war ended, some remained. They were not immune from the necessity to choose a side. Some of their names may be found on lists required by New York State.

Americans living in New York were asked to choose right away. Two days after the battles of Lexington and Concord on April 20, 1775 a Provincial Convention of County delegates met in New York City and adopted a pledge to be sent to each county for signatures to associate for security and to carry out measures recommended by the Continental Congress and New York State. The pledge was to be returned to the Provincial Congress of New York by July 15th with the names of signers AND THOSE WHO REFUSED TO SIGN.

A person who refused to sign may have felt strongly that the colonies should remain British or they may have been people who did not want to get actively involved, just wanting to stay neutral and hope it would all end soon.

Each choice involved danger. There was no easy answer on the frontier as the fortunes of both sides waxed and waned. The story of the war in this area was the story of various depredations of small settlements and militia responses. Patriot settlers were very frightened and felt extreme hatred for the Tories and their Native allies.

A letter written in 1785, just three years after the war ended, was published in the Ellenville Journal and republished in Sylvester's History of Ulster County shows how strong that fear and hatred was. It was written by Nicholas Depui of Wawarsing and sent to his former neighbor Richard Broadhead who had relocated to the Port Jervis area.

"I have often thought on the Situation of your family living on the Frontyere during the last war, exposed to the Ravages of the Savages and the more horrid White Savages. It is the most surprising thing in Nature to think that White men could join themselves to Savages to Imbrue their hands in the blood of their Countrymen."

This letter shows one perspective. The Loyalists and Native Americans felt a similar fear and hatred because of abuses perpetrated by the Patriots. What then occurred were a series of attacks, first by one side and then a response by the other side.

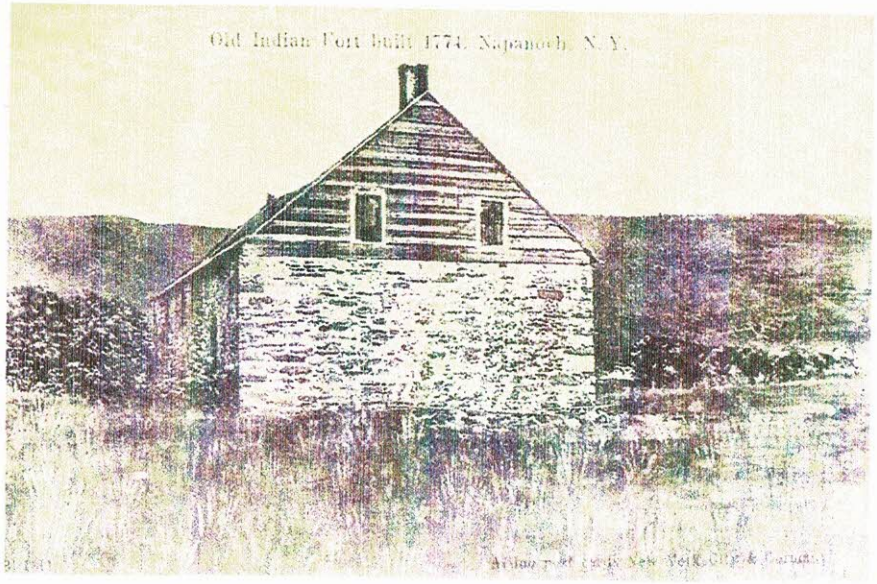
The Battle of Chestnut Woods is part of just such a series of events. It did not happen in isolation. Our exhibit will tell more of the story!

CONNECTING WATER, PEOPLE AND THE CATSKILLS

News From Time & the Valleys Museum # 14

Time and the Valleys MUSEUM & Lost Catskills Farm

During the American Revolution there were forts that contributed to the defense of the new Nation by the Patriot forces. In New York, the most famous and important of them were Fort Ticonderoga built to protect the Lake Champlain Lake George corridor, Fort Stanwix which protected the Mohawk River Valley and the forts of the Hudson River Valley, including West Point, Stony Point and Fort Montgomery near the Bear Mountain. They were all different types of fortifications. Ticonderoga was a stone fortress built during the French and Indian Wars. Stanwix was a wooden fort with block houses and log walls. The Hudson Valley defenses were constructed primarily of dirt walls protected by abatis, which were obstacles of felled trees with sharpened tops facing outward to impede enemy attacks.



Old Indian Fort built 1774, Napanoch, NY

The question that may come up is, what were forts like on the frontier, especially in Ulster County. There are forts mentioned in the military reports to the governor, in the story of various attacks on settlements and the two battles fought in the area.

An important task at the museum has been to understand the character of these "forts" and their locations. It has not been easy since extensive descriptions do not seem to exist. Another problem is that the locations were fluid, changing as the character of the war on the frontier evolved.

The Ulster County Militia, the primary defenders of the frontier settlements of the Rondout and upper Delaware River valleys, occupied numerous home bases during the war years. These ranged from local homes, usually of stone to prevent destruction by fire, converted into fortresses to which neighbors could quickly flee upon an agreed signal to wooden forts constructed with blockhouses, barracks, breastworks and abatis. There were also guarded supply depots and ammunition and weapons magazines. All were crucially important to the operation of the militia.

The first three years of the American Revolution, ending with the grand British strategy of the three-pronged attack on New York in 1777, spared the frontier settlements for the most part. After the Natives abandoned the fight in major battles, they and their Tory allies focused on frontier attacks to obtain supplies for the British and to intimidate isolated settlements. That made the years 1778 through 1781 the time of fort building on the frontier.

In 1778, the year of massacres from Wyoming Valley in Pennsylvania north to the Cherry Valley, the need for forts became urgent. Locally the Ulster Militia built more permanent forts or fortified local homes with wooden walls to be able to respond quickly to attacks. Our local battle of Chestnut Woods occurred in September of that year after an attack at Pinebush near Kerhonkson. The Ulster Militia responded from a fort called Honk located above Honk Falls near Napanoch that had just been occupied in August of that year.

In August, Colonel John Cantine who was the commander of the Ulster Militia reported the disposition of troops in Ulster and Orange Counties to Governor George Clinton. He listed approximately 400 troops to protect the settlers, including about 90 in Orange County at forts in Peenpack and Minisink, both forts on the Minisink Road and Trail. The Ulster County troops were located at Mamakating (40), Leurenkill near Ellenville (12), Honk (130), and two forts on the Esopus Trail, Great Shandaken (80) and Little Shandaken (possibly 100).

By 1779 plans had been made to build two stronger forts, one at Great Shandaken and another at Lackawack, which may be where the Rondot Reservoir is today. By this time, the fort at Honk had burned and it was decided not to rebuild it.

Many communities on the Minisink or Old Mine Road fortified their Dutch era stone houses or more recent stone buildings as forts. The pictured fort at Kerhonkson was near the Pinebush attack of 1778 and may have been where local settlers fled as the signal of attack came.

The forts in Ulster County were often different from forts commonly imagined, but they were no less important to the early settlers who survived because of them and became the ancestors of many of the current residents of the Rondout and Neversink Valleys.

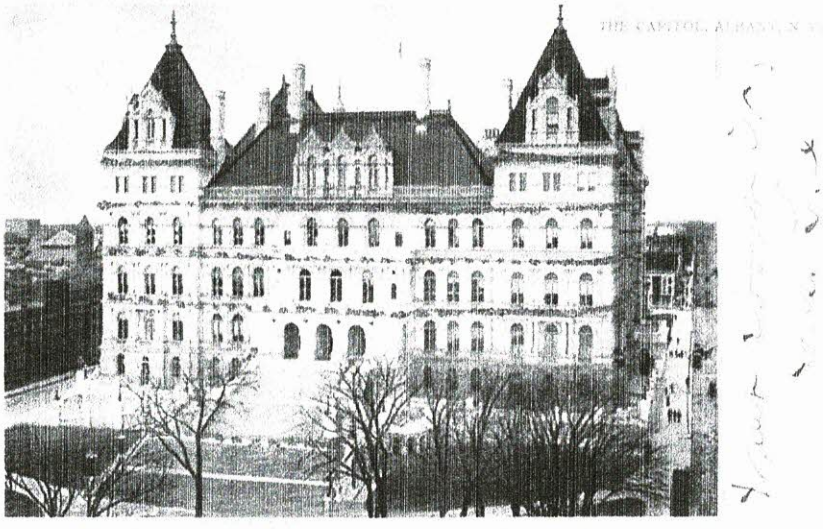
CONNECTING WATER, PEOPLE AND THE CATSKILLS

News From Time & the Valleys Museum #6

Lynn M. Priebe

Time and the Valleys MUSEUM & Lost Catskills Farm

So many mysteries! That is what we encounter when we try to understand what has come before. There are always new things to discover and so much more to learn. It is particularly true when studying the events of the Revolutionary War on the frontier. Who had time to write when trying to survive? And when they did, was the account one sided? It would be very important to know since as mentioned in article number 4, Patriots, Loyalists or Native Americans would see the same events differently.



"New York State Capitol building before 1911 fire.

Our coming frontier exhibit must be as accurate as possible. How do we achieve our goals? It takes much research and our team has been involved in the effort for over a year. We have searched our book collection, local historical societies, battle sites and documents that can be accessed on line. When doing so, we have found stories that are not consistent and often very incomplete. It is a never-ending search.

The best choices to learn what happened are primary sources that were created at the time or shortly afterwards. These would be reports to government, official documents, letters to family members, diaries or journals, newspaper stories and books written by participants or their descendants. These sources also have their limitations. Spelling of names was not consistent, locations not pinpointed and viewpoints varied.

Those problems are nothing compared to the complete destruction of sources. That happens on a small scale every day, but a catastrophic loss to the State of New York occurred on March 29, 1911 just after midnight when fire broke out in the New York State Assembly Library located in the State Capitol building. It quickly spread to the precious State library collection. By dawn, it was finally out. Much of the building was saved, but the night watchman had died and the library was almost a complete loss. The cause was determined to be defective wiring in the ornate building which had been completed in 1899. At the time the collection was considered the fifth largest in the United States! An estimated 450,000 books and 270,000 manuscripts and irreplaceable documents of colonial and early state history were lost. It has been called the greatest library disaster in modern times. An irony is that the collection had been due to be moved to the new Education building that was being erected, by January 1, 1911, but because of construction delays the move had been changed to September of that year!

On a visit to the Capitol in 2003, my daughter and I were first made aware of the fire as the tour guide pointed out the the burn marks on the beautiful grand staircase leading to the third and fourth floors that had housed the library. As a lover of history, it made me very sad. We should all be sad. Nothing can be done to recover those records, but much more exists that can be in danger. Families may possess the key to solving many mysteries from the past. Keep that in mind as you wonder what to do with old family documents. Consider sharing them with historical groups. They can be copied or scanned and still be yours. We all are historians!

CONNECTING WATER, PEOPLE AND THE CATSKILLS

News From Time & the Valleys Museum #7

Lynn M. Priebe

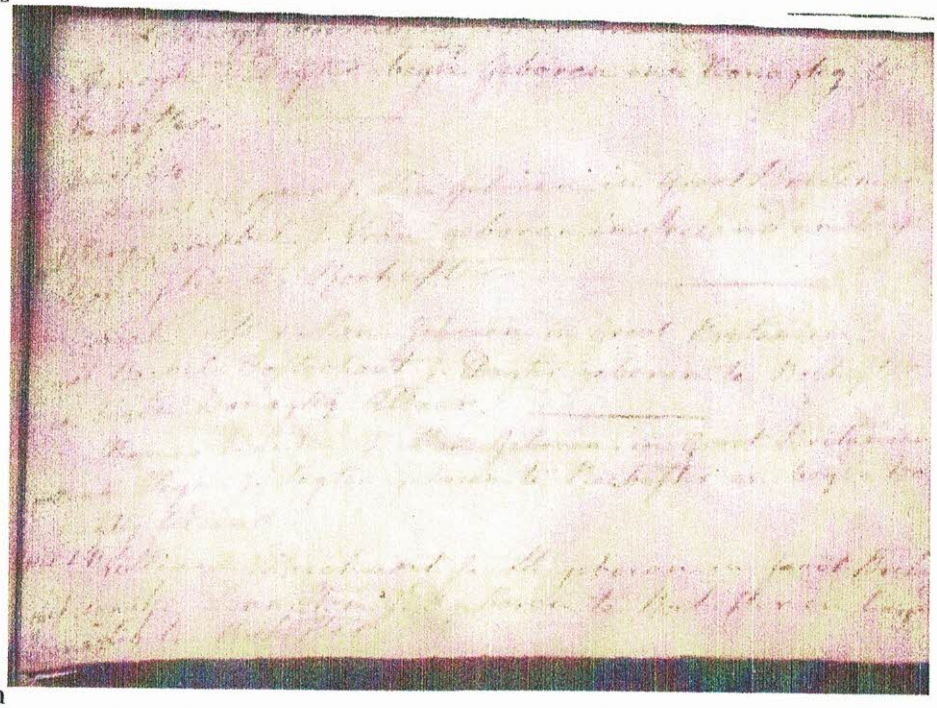
Time and the Valleys MUSEUM & Lost Catskills Farm

Was my patriot ancestor Noah Cross a hero or a traitor? To me he was a hero though he fought for both sides during the American Revolution. He was far from the only soldier who did this. In a war that lasted eight years with the fortunes of each side changing often, there were many who switched sides and became traitors. The most famous of these was brave American General Benedict Arnold who did so much to help America win its freedom, but in the end became its most hated enemy. His defection was so horrible that when our Constitution was written in 1787, the crime of treason was the only one expressly defined.

Two Ulster County soldiers who switched their loyalties illustrate that changing sides could have momentous consequences. Both served in the Ulster Militia from the Marbletown area, so may have even known each another. One was a descendant of the early Dutch settlers of the Hudson Valley who first professed his loyalty to the Revolution but chose to later side with the British and paid the ultimate price. The second, a British foot soldier who deserted in Canada, turned up in the Town of Rochester as a member of the militia. Their stories are like those of many others, most of them unknown.

Jacob Rose (Rosa/Roosa), along with eight others of that family name, signed the Marbletown Articles of Association in 1775 to support the Continental Congress and the New York State government in opposition to the British. Rose served in the Ulster County Militia under Lt. Colonel Johannes Hardenbergh. He was court-martialed and fined in February of 1777 for refusing to obey orders. Shortly afterwards, he went over to the British. enlisting in the King's American Regiment under Loyalist Colonel Edmond Fanning, a Long Island born attorney educated at Yale. Rose was tasked with recruiting Loyalists from the upper Delaware River region. As a result of his first effort, he recruited, Jacob Middagh, who lived on the East Branch of the river. He and other recruits were successfully delivered to New York City. Middagh returned with Rose on a second recruitment trip that did not end favorably for either one. Trying to make their way through Patriot territory, they and about 40 others were captured in Orange County on April 28, 1777. All were court-martialed and found guilty of treason at Fort Montgomery. Most were pardoned, but Rose and Middagh were sentenced to death. They were hung in Kingston on May 13, 1777. Were they heroes or traitors?

Noah Cross, was baptized in Somersetshire England in 1750, the son of an unmarried 21 year old mother. Since he had few prospects for advancement due to his birth, he joined the British army in 1772, and as a member of the 7th Regiment of Foot arrived in Quebec the next year. In 1775 his regiment was involved in the fall of Chambly and St. John's and the defense of Quebec from the attack of the American army under Generals Richard Montgomery and Benedict Arnold. The regiment numbers dropped from 295 to 63 because of death, battle injuries, disease, capture and desertion. Noah's name is found on along list of deserters as of January 27, 1776. Three others on the list were Thomas Cropper, Thomas Bunting and William Marchant. All four names showed up just two months later in the marriage register of the Dutch Reformed Church of Accord, in March and April of 1776. Was that a way to hide out?



Noah married local girl Rachel Osterhoudt on March 24, 1776. The record was in Dutch, but can be translated to read, "March 24, 1776. Noah Cross, young man never married, born in Great Britian and Rachel Oosterhoudt, young maiden never married, born in Rochester. And both residing there."

Noah joined Levi Pawling's 3rd Ulster Militia Regiment in 1777. His unit served protecting the frontier and the Hudson Highland forts during the "Year of the Hangman." They responded to the attacks on Forts Clinton and Montgomery and the burning of Kingston. An irony of that time was that Noah's old unit, the 7th Regiment of Foot was among the British troops that attacked Fort Clinton. How fortunate for Noah that he was not taken as a prisoner, as many were that day. Perhaps he had not responded to that call for troops.

Noah and Rachel lived long lives and were parents to at least 12 children. The large Cross family became prominent in Ulster and Sullivan Counties. Noah is a patriot ancestor to many in the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution. I am proudly one of them. My great great great great grandfather Noah Cross is certainly a hero to me!

CONNECTING WATER, PEOPLE AND THE CATSKILLS

News From Time & the Valleys Museum # 9

Time and the Valleys MUSEUM & Lost Catskills Farm

To understand the Revolutionary War events that happened in Ulster and Orange Counties and in neighboring Pennsylvania, we at Time and the Valleys Museum have worked to know the characteristics of the opposing forces that clashed in the area. When the words Continentals, Minutemen, Rangers or militia are used in reference to the Patriots; or Regulars, Grenadiers, Regiment of Foot or Dragoons used when referencing British forces, a basic understanding of each is needed. The paid Germanic troops and the Loyalist military units along with their Native allies also must be factored into our basic knowledge.

The storied British Army had, in the earlier years of the 18th Century, defeated the French and their Native allies in a series of wars that ended with the Peace of Paris in 1763. Well trained, brave, proud and handsomely uniformed, they engendered fear in their enemies. At the outbreak of the Revolution, the "Redcoats" came to Boston to tame the unruly rebels.

The Regulars of the British Army were made up of regiments of foot soldiers, horse soldiers, artillery and marines that landed from ships. The regiments of foot, the backbone of the forces, grew in number as the war continued. The grenadiers were selected from these regiments because they were the strongest and tallest and originally given the job of throwing grenades into fortifications. They wore bear skinned hats that made them appear even more fearful. There was also the light company as part of the regiment made up of very physically fit soldiers who served as Rangers or Scouts ranging ahead of the main body of troops to observe enemy movements. Dragoons were the cavalry, often used to charge into the fight to turn the tide of battle.

British Grenadier bearskin hat

Fighting alongside the British were the German troops, American Loyalist units and Native allies.

Over 29 thousand Germanic soldiers were sent by numerous allied provinces that would later unite to form the nation of Germany. The most famous were those from the province of Hess-Cassel and thus all the troops became known in America as Hessians.

The American Loyalists were considered extremely important. They knew the land, could spy easily and formed close bonds with Native Americans. The British formed numerous Loyalist regiments with names such as Butler's Rangers, the King's Royal Regiment, the Royal Highland Emigrants, and the King's American Regiment, the group that Jacob Rose lost his life recruiting for (see article #7).

The Native forces in New York were mostly under the command of Thayendanegea also known as Joseph Brant, an educated Mohawk, whose family had been close to Sir William Johnson, the British Indian agent who had died just before the Revolution. Many Iroquois and other New York tribes such as the Esopus united under his leadership and impacted the war in New York in important ways.

The Americans had two major armies, the Continental Line or regulars under the command of General George Washington controlled by the Continental Congress, and militia groups in various states.

Washington's troops served set terms, at first one year, then three and finally for the duration of the war. They were paid by Congress, when it was able to do so, issued uniforms and served wherever the army moved in the 13 states.

The militia were state troops, often called up as needed in the event of a threat or impending attack. They were the home army meant to protect the local area only. Milita units had long been a part of life in the colonies. New York's militia laws had first been enacted in 1664. Colonial governors under various British monarchs made minor changes. The typical units were called up only when needed, had minimal training and could not be called out of state for more than three months. Service was required for all able-bodied men between the ages of 16 and 50 under penalty of fine or imprisonment. The soldiers needed to provide their own arms and ammunition and were usually attired in their own clothes, rather than issued uniforms. Each county fielded its own units. Militias could not have won the war alone, but contributed in many battles to American victories.

To tell our story in the lower Hudson and Catskill region, most attention needs to be given to the Loyalist Regiments and their Native allies in opposition to the Ulster and Orange County militia units. In future columns more will be told of the Ulster County militia who bravely responded so often to the Native and Loyalist attacks in the watershed area.

CONNECTING WATER, PEOPLE AND THE CATSKILLS

News From Time & the Valleys Museum # 10

Time and the Valleys MUSEUM & Lost Catskills Farm

Who were the men that served on the frontier in Ulster County? They were those who lived there and who signed up to help protect their neighbors from the horrors of Native and Tory attacks by joining the Ulster County Militia. To understand all who served, this column will highlight a man named Jacobus Davenport, who served in the Ulster County Militia as a private for five years. He was a colorful character who lived in Neversink after the Revolution and died there at the impressive age of 100.

Jacobus was born in the town of Rochester around the year 1759. He professed to not be quite sure of the date. When the war broke out, he was a young man of only 16. According to his application for a pension filed in 1833 at the age of 74, a year after Congress passed a law giving a salary for life to Revolutionary War veterans who had served for 2 years in that struggle, he served each year from 1777 to 1781.

When a soldier filed for a pension, he needed to provide as many details as possible about his service including dates, engagements involved in and the names of his commanders and fellow soldiers. Any discharge papers or other physical evidence in his possession was also asked for. Not surprisingly such detail was difficult for men so advanced in age and the pay records or sign-up papers often no longer existed. The deponent usually had witnesses testify to his service record.

We at the museum sought out the pension records of Jacobus Davenport to solve some of the mysteries about our local Battle of Chestnut Woods. In the definitive history of Sullivan County, written by James Eldridge Quinlan and published in 1873, Jacobus claimed to have been part of a 300 man force needed to bury the many dead from that engagement. Our monument and the Clinton Papers, the most accurate record of the war, claimed only three were killed rather than the whole force of about 20 minus three who made it back to Fort Honk.

Jacobus volunteered to serve in Colonel John Cantine's 3rd Regiment of the Ulster County militia in 1778, the year of the battle, but mentions nothing about his duties other than to "guard against the Indians." But in his later years, he often told the tale of helping to bury the dead! It was strange that he left this out of his pension application. When he talked of his service in 1780, he devoted much testimony to an attack on the settlement of Wawarsing and the fort in which he was stationed.

His version of events follows.

"I entered the service for nine months and was stationed at the part of Rochester called Wawarsing guarding the frontiers against the Indians and Tories who had become almost as numerous as the Indians themselves and quite as barbarous. The neighborhood of Wawarsing was burned by the Tories and Indians this year. The burning commenced a little before daylight in the morning. My company was stationed in an old stone building with some of the fortifications affixed to the same. The Indians and Tories made an attack upon our fort and two of them were killed and they fled. We pursued them twenty or thirty miles in the woods but had no engagement."

Jacobus told about his 1780 service in such detail that one would think it an accurate account. Perhaps it was, but he got the year wrong! The attack on Wawarsing happened not in 1780, rather on April 12, 1781. Too many years had gone by to get it all right. He was granted his pension despite some errors, based on his account and a number of witnesses who corroborated his record.

Jacobus married and he and wife Maria moved from Rochester to Neversink around 1808, raising a family there. He spent much time with two other veterans, John Barnes and Peter Coons, who had been members of the Dutchess County Militia, reminiscing about the pivotal events of their younger years. His two friends also lived long lives but died before Jacobus and were buried near Curry in the Townsend Cemetery. When Jacobus died, he requested that he be buried there between them. He rests under a government issued military stone. The Cemetery has since become known as the Davenport Cemetery in his honor.

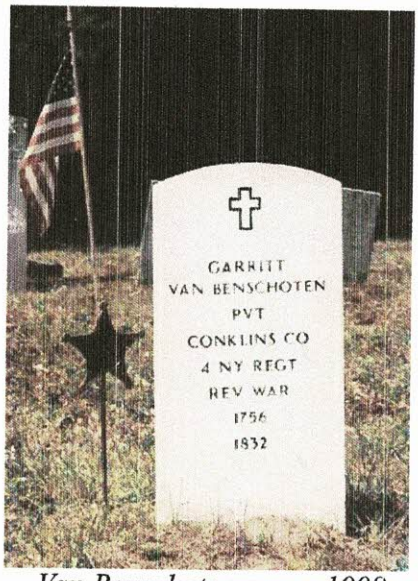
Thank you for your service Jacobus!

CONNECTING WATER, PEOPLE AND THE CATSKILLS

News From Time & the Valleys Museum # 11

Time and the Valleys MUSEUM & Lost Catskills Farm

The white military stone gleamed in the sunlight as I came toward it in 1998 while photographing and researching in the Fallsburg Neversink Cemetery located just below the Neversink Reservoir dam. I was there for a project celebrating the 200th birthday of the Township of Neversink.



Van Benschoten grave 1998

The Velie Cemetery, as it was originally known, was the burial place of the earliest settlers of old Neversink Village and the Divine Corners and Hasbrouck areas. On the stone I read that Private Garritt Van Benschoten, 1756 - 1832, had served during the American Revolution in Conklin's Company of the 4th Regiment of Ulster Militia. Why was the stone so new looking?

At the time I knew very little about the people in the cemetery, only that my great great grandfather William Bertholf, the first Bertholf to settle in Sullivan County was buried there. As the years have gone by, I have changed, but so has the Van Benschoten stone. It is no longer white. When I visited most recently in the fall 0f 2024 to photograph it for the Sullivan County Revolutionary War Semiquincentennial Commission, it no longer gleamed in the sun.

I learned the reason that it was once so new. The Beaverkill Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution had placed that stone on the grave in the early 1990's to honor him. That is part of the mission of the organization, as well as to honor and serve the veterans of all of our Nation's wars. For example, on this coming Saturday April 25th, members of many DAR chapters will participate in the Third Annual Caring for Your Cemetery Day set aside for cleaning up of old cemeteries. As a member, I will be in Fallsburg Neversink Cemetery to help clean up fallen branches and to right old stones.

The grave in 2024

It turns out that Private Van Benschoten was an acknowledged hero of the war. He was a member of the Ulster Militia, whose experiences as a soldier were not confined to guard duty. Private Garritt Van Benschoten became a hero at the battle of Fort Montgomery, which took place near Bear Mountain on October 6, 1777. The fort and one called Fort Clinton nearby had been constructed and manned to keep the British from gaining control of the Hudson River.

Garritt was born in Rhinebeck, Dutchess County on July 3, 1755, not 1756 as his stone proclaims, and was baptized in the Dutch Reformed Church there the following year. He was a descendent of early Dutch settlers who had arrived in the New World in the 17th century. He was 20 when his family moved to the Newburgh area in 1775. He and his father Isaac both signed the Articles of Association in New Marlboro in that year and joined the militia.

Family members passed down many stories about his service throughout the war that cannot be proven because Garritt died in 1832 before he was able to file for the lifetime pension, which would have given more details about his record. What we do know of Conklin's Company may very well have involved Garritt. The company participated in the battle for New York City in 1776 and was tasked with the improvement of Forts Montgomery and Clinton and the construction of Fort Constitution near West Point throughout 1777. They were involved in the battle at Fort Montgomery in October.

It was there that Garritt Van Benschoten earned his hero designation. As the story, which appeared in his obituary in the Ulster Plebian said, "He was one of the few who stood by their cannon, and continued to fire on the enemy until they came up to wrest the torch from the hand of Colonel Bruyn (his commander)." He managed to escape the battlefield without capture but not without injury. He lost the vision in his left eye during that battle.

Garritt Van Benschoten suffered from other infirmities in his old age, including a limp from another war wound and deafness, but he had survived the war, moved to Woodbourne and later the Hasbrouck area of Sullivan County, married and raised at least 12 children. He died on June 3, 1832 and was laid to rest in the Velie Cemetery in Divine Corners, a short distance from his home. His descendants would grow up in a free nation because of the sacrifices he and other members of the Ulster Militia made. We must continue to honor them.

CONNECTING WATER, PEOPLE AND THE CATSKILLS

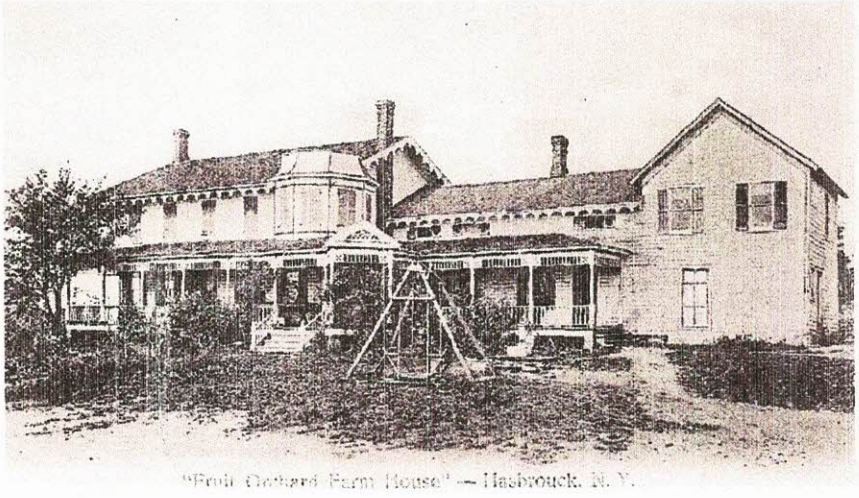
News From Time & the Valleys Museum # 12

Time and the Valleys MUSEUM & Lost Catskills Farm

Do you have any postcards that you wonder about? Would you like to know how old they might be, or what location they show or refer to? Are they valuable? How should you store them safely?

Join us at Time and the Valleys Museum on Sunday May 3rd at 2 PM for a program to be presented by John Duda from the Kaaterskill Post Card Club. He will be able to help you out.

Postcards were first issued by the government. These had no art or photos, but rather an imprinted 1 cent stamp with room for the address and space on the back for a message. The era of private cards started with advertising and Exposition cards, beginning with the Chicago Exposition of 1873. These cards were colorful art work and pieces of history, and may have led to the birth of postcard collecting.



"Fruit Orchard Farm House" — Hasbrouck, N. Y.

Many people still may send postcards when on vacation. I was at Jamestown and Colonial Williamsburg for a week in the early 2000's and sent one home to my family. I returned long before the card got there! That is not how it was in earlier times. Postcards costing only 1 cent to mail often arrived at their destination within 24 hours! They were the phone calls of the day, and one could arrange for a carriage to pick them up at the train station or plan a date for tomorrow's dance. They also were the greeting cards for holidays, or a quick reminder to the one we loved how much we cared. And they were often very beautiful with colorful artwork and gold leaf attached. No wonder they were kept as family treasures!

My Grandmother Loretta Cypert Bertholf (1894-1971) kept her cards, and after her death my cousin Martha Allison TerBush arranged them in a beautiful album which we display every summer at our annual family reunion. She had birthday greetings, as well as Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years and Easter postcards, all with beautiful embossed art work that glitters still. She also had photo postcards of her travels or of local landmarks or happenings such as the huge Monticello fire or a flood on the Neversink River. The most precious to our family are the cards she exchanged with her beau Ben Bertholf from 1910 to 1916, and the card which showed what her childhood home looked like.

As was common in those early days of the 20th century, many local farmers opened their homes as boarding houses in the summer months. As advertising, cards showing them were issued. These cards have preserved the homes for local historians. The house of my grandmother shown on that postcard is the only image we have of it when it was a boarding house.

At the museum, we have a large collection of these important cards, carefully catalogued by our staff and archivally stored. A featured collection that we have assembled is one that features the cards of famous Sullivan County photographer Otto Hillig. He took photos of local landmarks, news events and precious formal portraits that were often sent as postcards to family far away.

The era of postcards may have ended, but the stories they tell continue. We can still come upon a new view that adds to our knowledge. Some of what we have collected at Time and the Valleys will be on display. My grandmother's collection will definitely be there. Perhaps you possess some important history in your collection of postcards. Bring your collection or your questions, and join us on Sunday to learn more about the fascinating hobby of postcard collection and its importance for the preservation of history.