



# Gilboa Historical Society

*Learning about, sharing, and preserving our history*

SPRING 2014 V. 16.1

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Please check your address on the back of this newsletter. Let us know of corrections or if you will have a temporary address at the time of our December publication. Asterisk(s) next to your name indicate that your membership is paid up. No asterisks? Use the application on page 39 to earn *your* star.

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## THE STATUS OF FORKS-IN-THE-ROAD SCHOOLHOUSE

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There has been discussion about the future of this building: some want to move it to the Gilboa Museum campus, while others want to keep it in its current location to the east of Mayham Pond.

It may be that this discussion has become moot. If it is true the building cannot be moved without being dismantled, then the question becomes “How can we—how *should* we—protect this landmark?”

This issue includes articles on the Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse specifically, and the role that this schoolhouse and its sisters have played in rural communities. We hope these articles motivate you to think about what should happen with this significant building listed as #353808 on the historic register.

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**The Gilboa Historical Society meets at 7 P.M. at the Gilboa Town Hall  
on the third Wednesday of the month, March–December.**

The **Gilboa Museum**, 122 Stryker Road, is open noon–4:30  
Saturdays and Sundays, from July through Labor Day, on Columbus Day weekend,  
and by appointment (607 588-9413).      <http://www.gilboafossils.org>

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## FREE PUBLIC SECULAR EDUCATION

### *The Role of the Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse*

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*Gerry Stoner*

Education has been controlled by—and limited to—powerful classes: feudal lords, church aristocracy, and, later, landed gentry. At the time of our Revolution, education often paired with churches and the idea of secular education was still reserved for the wealthy and powerful.

Even 18th century democratic icons like Jefferson and Franklin didn't actively promote free public secular education. Literacy was most often handed down from parent to child, and was either religious (being able to read the Bible) or vocational (skills taught by parents or craftsmen to children or apprentices). Only the charter of the Massachusetts Bay Colony required that all children—boys *and* girls—learn to read and write.

There were some specialized free secular schools during this time: in 1785 the Manumission Society proposed a free school for colored children, and opened for twelve pupils in November 1787. It was incorporated in 1794 as the African Free School (*The New York Public School, Being a History of Free Education in the City of New York*, 1905). But by 1795, it had become obvious that *general* education (reading, writing, and mathematics for *all* of the population) was essential, and New York City Mayor DeWitt Clinton founded the first public secular primary school in the country—the Free School Society was founded in 1805 to provide charity education for impoverished children and immigrants in Manhattan.

Similar initiatives spread to other urban areas, and then smaller centralized areas like Stamford and Jefferson began to support academies for large numbers of local students and with more advanced courses. Rural areas also started to develop one-room schoolhouses providing secular education for all children in the area. By 1825—in just 20 years—there were 8000 schools in the state with 500,000 students, but it took another 40 years for reorganizations of the system and universal agreement to make these schools free.

### *Education along Blenheim Ridge*

A cluster of farms, a major crossroad, or water power for mills could attract a number of families who wanted (and could support) education for their children. By the mid-19th century, three schools served South Gilboa (aka Blenheim Ridge). Schoolhouse 14 served the farming population on present-day Megan Road; schoolhouse number 11 was on a turnpike midway between

the villages of Stamford and Gilboa in the hamlet of South Gilboa; and the oldest school of the three (ca. 1812)—what we now call the Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse—served the population working in mills powered by the spillway beside the dam on Mayham Pond as well as farms in the area.

Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse helped develop—and should be a monument to—the concept of free public secular education.

- Before 1800, rural education for children was generally limited to the educational skills already learned by their parents.
- Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse is one of the older schools (original lease of the land: May 18, 1812) in South Gilboa and is representative of all the one-room schoolhouses in Schoharie County.
- Over its lifetime, education at these schools became more and more *secular* following the guidelines of the Board of Regents.
- And as we will see in the next article, enrollment in the school became free 35 years before the law establishing *free* public secular education (tuition in 1832 was a half-cord of wood per student; a year later, this was covered as a tax on the general population, and the “free” in public education became New York Law in 1865).

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## Fred Murphy at the Forks-in-the-Road

Fred Murphy (1889–1979) was a student at the Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse (1901) and attended the Stamford Academy (1905). After putting himself through college selling *Saturday Evening Post* magazine subscriptions, he joined the Grolier Corporation as a salesman and ended up buying the *Encyclopedia Americana* and *Grolier* by 1936.

He knew it would be easier for customers to buy his encyclopedias if they had a bookshelf to hold them. He set up Catskill Craftsman in Stamford to fill this need, a win-win arrangement for everyone.

He started spending more time on the farm in South Gilboa, and became involved in the economic fortunes of the area by teaming really good technical people with exceptional business managers, resulting in companies like Prospect Farms, Timberlands, and Audio Sears. Murphy also set up a creamery and a chain of convenience stores to process and sell Prospect Farms milk; and Prospect Enterprises to build affordable local housing and to restore the Rexmere Hotel for BOCES. 800107

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## MANAGING A ONE-ROOM SCHOOLHOUSE

*As Seen at the Forks-in-the-Road*

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*Katharine Harrington and  
Mildred L. Bailey*

Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse has unusual documentation, thanks to transcriptions of School Board minutes by Gilboans Mildred Bailey and Katharine Harrington. Bailey was historian for the Town of Jefferson and later for Schoharie County, and Harrington, Bailey's contemporary, was historian for the Town of Gilboa. These minutes are now safe with Conesville Historian Bee Mattice.

The Harrington/Bailey articles are available at [northerncatskillshistory.com/societies/gilboa/](http://northerncatskillshistory.com/societies/gilboa/), and the following are thematic adaptations of them.

Harrington documented the founding of the Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse in *History of School District No. 6, South Gilboa. Originally Part of Blenheim and Jefferson and Erroneously Called District No. 7.*

The lease used a form similar to contemporary tenant leases with a "fine and legible penmanship" and with "diamond-shaped pieces of paper stuck on with some kind of black glue in lieu of seals." It was dated May 18, 1812 from "David Stewart to the Trustees of District No. 7—viz., Aaron Stevens, John Beach, Thomas Maynard and Ariel Wellman and their successors in office."

The deposit was for one shilling and the rental, to be paid by the aforesaid trustees and their successors, was "3 pints of good merchantable winter wheat" to be delivered to Daniel Stewart on Feb. 1st of every year at the City of Albany, or to John Lansing or to his heirs or assigns.

\* \* \*

Mildred Bailey transcribed the minutes of the school's trustees, from the notice for the first meeting ("at the school meeting held at the School House in District No. 7 in Blenheim by Special notice given to the Freeholders and Inhabitants of the District by order of the trustees on the 20th day of October 1827") to the last ("On the 31st day of May 1980 members of the Gilboa Town Board and friends of the school met for a covered dish dinner at the school house and it was voted to release our claim to the Town Board. The Town Board will now seek a Quit Claim Deed from the Stamford Central School District.

These records include

- Names of all moderators, clerks, trustees, and collectors, starting with David Parson's first board until the Stamford Central School District was organized to include District No. 7.
- Names of teachers at the Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse—those whose dates were known are listed as 1837 Dorinda Choate; 1875 Mr. Wilcox and Miss Boggs; 1888 S. K. Laughran; 1889 Helen Maynard; 1890 Nellie Wood, summer term Melvin Parsons; 1892 Ida Oakley; 1893 Joseph Zelig; 1894 Ethel Shew; 1895 W. R. Clark [R. W. Clark winter term]; 1897 Laura Becker; 1902 Laura Becker; 1910 Florence Norris; 1911 Bess Topping; 1912–1918, 1920–1928 Blanche Croni, Curtis Stewart, Mary Schuille, Hattie Foote & Margaret Moore; 1928–1929 and 1933–1935 Mildred Lewis; 1935–1936 Olive Franklin; 1936–1938 Anna Vamosy, Susie Crosier. Others, but not identified as to year of their service included Mary Susan Coachman; Anna VanDyke of Roxbury; Gould Jennings; Edward Loughran; Anna Martin; Chauncey Stevens; William Govern; Robert Shields; Blanche Crowell; Lena Cohn; Mrs. Rene Brownell.
- Forgiveness of tuition was generally accommodated in the minutes using wording like that of the first minutes: "Voted also that the trustees be authorized to Exonerate all such poor and indigent persons as they shall consider unable to pay for the instruction of their children."
- At a meeting on October 9, 1832, the trustees felt that firewood was to be obtained by assessing each child one-half cord; however, on October 2, 1833, it was voted that the wood be got by the lowest bidder and paid for by raising a tax on the taxable inhabitants.
- The levying of taxes was always detailed at these trustee meetings and the trustees each year would record an entry like the first: "that the trustees be authorized to levy and collect a tax of Ten Dollars on the taxable Inhabitants of said District for the purpose of Supplying the School with wood the ensuing years, for repairing the School House in said district agreeable to the School Act."
- The expenditure of money used for heating and maintenance are continual items of interest: in 1828, the trustees paid Jerhail Lawrence \$6.00 for firewood for the winter 1828, and Bildad Hodge and Ezra Stevens recorded repairs to the school house costing \$2.15 and leaving a balance in the hands of the Collector on the 6th day of October 1828 of \$1.85. Ten years later, the repairs were fifty cents.
- The first mention of public money being received (it was allocated as one-half to be applied to the expenses of the winter term and one-half to the summer term) was in 1838.

- Discipline is brought up only occasionally. In the minutes of October 4, 1831: "Voted that the glass that is now out of the school house shall be got and put in by the trustees and charges put on the next rate bill. Voted that hereafter if any child shall in any way break or cause to be broke any glass the teacher shall direct word to the parents of such child and they shall within twenty-four hours after such notice cause the same to be replaced and shall be put in by the trustees and charged to him in his school bill." However, \$1.50 was raised for window repairs in 1839.
- January 15, 1845, was the deadline for John H. Salisbury, Schoharie County's Superintendent of Common Schools, to report on the twelve towns and 181 school districts in his jurisdiction. He pointed out that the original school house had been a log structure (description below).
- There were times when a family wished to change district (perhaps it was more easily accessible or there may have been other reasons). To do this the trustees and the town commissioners would meet and decide the question. William Choate was transferred from the South

### **Log Schoolhouses**

*John H. Salisbury, Superintendent of Common Schools*

[ . . . the original schoolhouse probably had been a log school house . . . ]

The log school house was a building almost square with logs notched and laid close together, one above the other. The space between the logs was then plastered both inside and outside with a mortar made of common clay. The chimney at one end of the building with an open fireplace opening into it was the only means of heat. A door was cut in the logs at one side of the chimney and the corner on the other side was used for the storage of wood. A window was cut in the logs opposite the chimney which furnished the only light for the little room. Along this end was placed a high slanting shelf at which to write with a slab seat for an accommodation for the writers. Seats for the other scholars were placed on the other two sides of the room, but not across the chimney end. These were also roughly hewn slabs each supported by 4 wooden legs. The teacher had a separate table and chair which stood at the end of the scholars bench on one side. The open space in the middle of the floor was used for the recitation by the pupils, who stood up to recite their spelling and reading. The girls sat on one bench and the boys on the other.

Jefferson district to No. 7, on November 14, 1843, and in March 1844, Timothy and William Oakley were set off from District No. 10 in Roxbury and united with District No. 7.

- On November 26, 1913, a special meeting of all the school's parents was called to consider purchasing a Waterman Waterbury Co. furnace. After hearing the salesman out, a motion was made to purchase the furnace resulting in a tie. A second ballot showed the majority of the district in favor of purchasing the furnace, and after the adjournment of special meeting, the furnace was purchased by the trustees to be delivered at once and paid for on or about November 1, 1914, for \$125.00.

Six months later, another special meeting was called to challenge the installation of a heater for school house. The referendum was read and voted to be paid by district by a vote of 8 to 6, but on June 3, John H. Finley, Commissioner of Education of the State of New York, made the special meeting invalid.

- During the summer of 1928, the building was enlarged by about 10 feet on the back and more windows were put in place. Emory A. Lewis had the contract for this and his helpers were Frith W. Lewis and Frank H. Lewis. The front steps were also improved.
- The Stamford Central School District was organized about 1936 and it included District No. 7, Blenheim, Gilboa and Roxbury.
- On August 16, 1935, a school reunion was organized, and subsequently one was held nearly every year up to and including 1980. By then, older members had moved away, were deceased, or incapacitated and attendance was dropping. The younger ones had lost interest.
- On May 31, 1980, members of the Gilboa Town Board and friends of the school met for a joint covered-dish dinner at the school house. The friends of the school voted to relinquish their claim. At that time, the town board was looking for a suitable place to vote in South Gilboa, and so they applied for a quit claim deed and used the Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse as a voting site until the mid-1990s.

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### The Gilboa Museum

122 Stryker Road, Gilboa, NY 12076

Open weekends July through Labor Day, plus Columbus Day  
and by appointment (607 588-9413).

Online 24/7 at <http://www.gilboafossils.org>



## WHO ATTENDED A ONE-ROOM SCHOOL?

### *Students at the Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse in the 19th Century*

Gerry Stoner

Three of the earliest families to arrive in the area of the future Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse were those of William Monfort, John Brewster, and Benjamin S. Mayham.

*William Monfort* arrived around 1795. The family maintained a diversified farm with dairy beef, other livestock, harvested grains and raised foodstuffs to be self-sufficient. A son, William Monfort, Jr., was an early graduate of Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse and became involved in a Prattville tannery. The company was called Pratt, Monfort, & Gould.

At least one branch of the family—Benjamin Frazee—stayed in the area, with Monforts and Mayhams intermarrying through the middle of the 19th century. (*Records of the Reformed Dutch Church in Blenheim, Mayham's History of Blenheim Hill*)

Another Monfort branch ended up in Greeley, CO. Warren Henry Monfort (1893–1979) was a teacher who was working on his father's farm during the Depression. He noted that the long-term price of corn was decreasing due to rising supplies and decreasing demand, so Monfort of Colorado fenced their acreage, brought free range cattle into pens, and fed them surplus corn bought from the local market. The farm specialized in “finishing” the beef (fattening them up for the market) while helping local farmers through the Depression.

By 1939, Monfort of Colorado became a major power in the Chicago Merchantile Exchange reports; by the late 1980s, it merged with Armour Meats as an arm of ConAgra Corporation, and then went on to bring Swift and Company into their fold as well.

*John Brewster* (aka John Breaster in *Child's Gazetteer*) was a New England descendent of Elder Brewster who arrived on the Mayflower. After the Revolution, he moved to South Gilboa and his children were among the first students attending the Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse.



The Dating Rock is located to the east of the Mayham Pond spillway, and lists the names of the owners of that property: William Monfort, 1812; William Mayham, 1824; and B.S. Mayham, 1848.

Photo courtesy of Gerry Stoner.

The family's mausoleum (right) is in the Brewster cemetery on Bailey Road south of State Route 23, and a number of Brewster descendants still live in this area.

According to Katharyn Harrington, Brewster built a millpond and operated a mill that he later sold to Benjamin S. Mayham. The millpond still exists (aka Mayham Pond) but there's no trace of the mill.

*Henry* (1752–1843) and *Catherine Maham* (1771–1820) may have arrived in Gilboa around 1795, but naturalization papers were not filed at that time. This oversight was corrected in 1840 (possibly to clarify title issues), and according to these papers the Mahams arrived in the U.S. in 1792.

William Mayham, the oldest son of Henry Maham, is said to have fought in the War of 1812. About 1815 he married and cleared land for three farms and built a log cabin on each. One was on the western end of Blenheim Ridge, one on the Bearkill, and one in South Jefferson. [Yes, the spelling of Maham was changed to Mayham.]

According to Hubbell's *History of Jefferson*, William Mayham was a blacksmith and the first settler on the John Stewart farm in South Jefferson. According to Raymond's *The Family of Henry Maham*, he then bought the Monfort homestead in South Gilboa in 1826.

William and Abigail had 6 children (2 died soon after birth) and the 4 children attended the Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse. The family (except for daughter Bathsheba Katherine) are buried in the Brewster Cemetery.

In the 1835 NY State Census, the farm did very well, with 80 acres of improved land, 80 head neat cattle (domesticated cattle), 3 horses, 11 sheep, 3 hogs, 24 yards of linen, and 50 yards of fullled and 50 yards of unfullled wool. [Fullled means wool that has been processed in two steps—(1) scouring (cleansing) and (2) milling (thickening). These two processes would have been done mechanically in a mill driven by the water in Mayham's Pond.]



Door of Brewster mausoleum in the cemetery on Bailey Road. Photo by Gerry Stoner

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# TODAY'S STUDENTS IN ONE-ROOM SCHOOLS

## *At the Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse*

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Carol Barber

In the fall of 1978, we had the opportunity to bring the Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse alive again by drawing on students from the Stamford Central School. In order to simulate the one-room atmosphere where students ranged in age from 6 to 16, we used two classes: Miss Pettingell's sixth-grade students and my fourth-grade students. The students were paired, with an older one matched with a younger one.

The SCS administration was very supportive, and the school nurse stayed on site with us as a safety precaution. The bus drove us there and picked us up at the end of the day. It was a time when these types of projects took the "whole community" to make it happen—and they did.

Prior to going on this two-day field trip, the students studied about the historical phenomenon of the local one-room schools. We spent one day cleaning up the school and then we spent a day simulating what it would have been like to attend school during that time. The students and teachers dressed in period dress, and organizational tasks such as cleaning the erasers and fetching water took some time.

Slates were used for math problems; students stood and gave oral reports; older students read to younger students. A great deal of attention was given to fostering the interdependency between the students of different ages: the older students were expected to protect, lead, and teach the younger, while the younger students would look to the older ones as a role model for their studies and behavior. We had a spelling bee, handwriting was taught in the method of the times, teachers read from books popular at that time, and we played games appropriate for that time at recess (I believe we had jump roping, tag, checkers—things of this type). We also had lessons in music and art using period materials.

According to some students, the highlight of the day were the maps on the wall (they are still there), and the teaming up of an older student with a younger one—I believe we continued to have mentoring between age groups for other things since they were so positive about the experience.

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All Gilboa Historical Society Newsletters are available free at  
<http://www.northerncatskillshistory/societies/Gilboa/>.

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## A FUTURE FOR THE FORKS-IN-THE-ROAD SCHOOLHOUSE

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The Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse is the only one-room schoolhouse left in original condition in Gilboa-Conesville. Our closest one-room-schoolhouse neighbors are the Fuller District #4 in Jefferson (maintained by the Girl Scouts Troup 2384) and Bridge Schoolhouse (maintained by the Blenheim Historical Society).

Without maintenance, the historic Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse has a bleak future. We can't expect the Town to maintain the school in light of today's tight budgets and other commitments, so unless the Gilboa Historical Society or other interested parties come forward, the building will become a community loss instead of a resource.

Why should the Gilboa Historical Society step up to the plate?

### *Preserve, share, educate*

If the Society's purposes include learning about, sharing, and preserving our history, our schoolhouse is an ideal agent for promoting these goals.

Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse itself is historic. Since the early 1800s, there's been a school at the site. As we watch more of our old and historic properties become memories with each passing year, we feel a sense of loss that can in part be lessened by preserving an important part of our history.

Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse played a historic role in the development of free public secular education and offered free public education 35 years before that practice became New York law in 1865.

Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse contains actual items that were used in the school: desks, benches, books, chalkboards, maps, and documents all bring the past into the present. We know the names of students and teachers who occupied the space and gained new knowledge and friendships over time. We can see what they studied, what they read, what games they played, what chores they had, what plans they made, and what memories they recorded.

### *Support these goals*

How might the Historical Society use these historic artifacts and building to support and further its goals?

*As a diorama of a one-room schoolhouse:* Although many of the desks have been removed, with the available artifacts we can replicate a fully outfitted schoolhouse within the actual school.

*As a workshop for researching local history:* The building has always served education, so it seems right to continue this tradition as a site for historical research. It could support a central repository for local archives and promote and teach research and preservation skills to our members, our students, and the general public. The western wall (with no windows) is ideal for permanent storage of documents. The northern wall (with windows) is ideal as a work area to spread out documents and artifacts being studied and preserved. Artifacts can be categorized, photographed, captioned, and shared with the Museum for exhibit with appropriate signage. A research library of digital and print resources and books could be accessible as a lending library at the Schoolhouse.

*As a central location for genealogical research:* Gilboa and Conesville lack widespread broadband access, but the Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse is a stone's throw—with a good slingshot—from the towers on Mt. Utsayantha. A mobile communication hub could support a network of computers with reasonable download speeds; and its hotspot could provide access to Ancestry.com and other genealogical sites for area researchers.

The Gilboa Historical Society membership reaches around 300 members by the end of each year, with greatly diverse interests and varying involvement. Some of us are passionate about sharing our area's history by showing others around the Museum and fossil exhibits. Others enjoy attending interesting talks by informed speakers. Others participate in our field trips to area sites. Still others contribute articles to our widely distributed Newsletter and appreciate the memories tickled or details shared by our generous writers. Some are enthusiastic about genealogy or other research, but are currently limited in what they can accomplish without a central location for access to local and Internet archives, information about preservation, and year-round programs to further these activities.

The physical size of the Museum limits available space to display our fossils and other artifacts, so no work-in-progress (collecting, sorting, preparing documents for Museum exhibits) and other important research and training can take place there. The Schoolhouse as a resource center could preserve historical items and create descriptive signage so the Museum could display items from the Society's collection. The Schoolhouse would maintain the archival database (with proof-of-ownership and artifact details) and describe all the documents and artifacts not currently on exhibit at the Museum. Re-viving the Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse to support our research and archival activities is an obvious next step for our vibrant Society.

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## WAR IN OUR HILLS

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*Beatrice Mattice*

An important Indian trail came over the mountain from the Catskill Creek to what is now Conesville, following the Manorkill Valley and through the town to the Schoharie Creek at Gilboa, and on. Several families came over this Indian Trail and settled along the Manorkill in 1764, many years before the Revolutionary War. (About 150 years later this same trail was improved as the Susquehanna Turnpike.)

The greater part of the Revolution took place in New York State from 1777 until 1780. The Catskill Mountains and the Schoharie Valley were the Western Frontier, and there was a constant threat of Indian attack when cabins were burned, livestock and property destroyed, and settlers captured or scalped. The Indians marked each scalp. For instance, scalps of farmers killed in their houses: the hoops were red, a figure of a hoe to mark their profession, great white circle and sun to show they were surprised in the daytime, a little red foot to show they stood upon their defense and died fighting for their lives and families. (From *Annals of Tryon County* by William W. Campell, 1849. This area was part of Tryon County then.)

Peter Richtmyer had cleared quite a farm along the Manorkill by the time the war began. He was working upon the flat below his house one afternoon when surprised by a squad of Indians and Tories, and taken prisoner. The captors had been on a raid near the Hudson and had a few prisoners that were bound with cords and compelled to carry the loot they had obtained.



Route of the Susquehanna Turnpike across Greene, Schoharie, and Delaware counties, starting at Catskill and ending at Unadilla. Map used courtesy of *The Catskills Magazine*, Volume I, No. 1 Winter 72-73 in "The Susquehanna Turnpike," by David George Erdmann. 400007



While searching through the cabin, one of the Tories threw a piece of Mrs. Richtmyer's linen on the floor, and as she stooped to pick it up, he snapped his gun at her breast, which fortunately missed fire. They ransacked the place and took five horses, which they loaded with plunder the next morning. Peter was forced to go along but fortunately his family was left behind. William E. Roscoe's 1882 *History of Schoharie County* tells that the party followed the Manorkill to the Schoharie, then to the Patchin place (near Blenheim) where they turned up the Westkill and encamped for the night near the sawmill. Jephtha R. Simms's *The History of Schoharie County and the Border Wars* (1845) tells the tale differently. That book says they proceeded to Laraway's on the Schoharie (at Prattsville) and from there to the east branch of the Delaware River to the house of a Tory; and that the Tory's wife maliciously told the leader, "It would be easier to carry scalps than prisoners."

Peter was not bound but watched closely. When called upon to turn in for the night, he jumped to escape and was confronted by a Tory, with a musket pointed at his chest. Seeing the gun was his own, with a worthless flint, he pressed on past the Tory and was urged on by the fruitless click, click of the old gun. He returned to his home on the fifth night. After finding his anxious family, they hastily packed a few possessions and pushed on that very night for the settlements along the Schoharie where the family remained until the war was over. Not long after this Richtmyer's buildings were all burned as were those of his patriotic neighbors.

Peter did duty under Captain Hager and was appointed Second Lieutenant on February 20, 1778. After the war, the early settlers of Conesville returned to their clearings and soon rebuilt their burned-out homesteads and started anew.



*Beatrice Mattice is the prolific historian for the Town of Conesville who has contributed to the New York Roots Web site, is the author of They Walked These Hills Before Me: An Early History of the Town of Conesville, and has written a number of articles and treatises.* 400013

## Gilboa Historical Society Donations

We are always trying to think of ways to improve the Gilboa Historical Society. Please get in touch with a GHS board member, or use your imagination and send us a note (use p. 39) with your ideas and support.

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## *From Schoharie County Historical Review* **A REVOLUTIONARY SOLDIER**

*Colonel Gershom Stevens in Gilboa*

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*Richard Lewis, Town of Gilboa Historian*

The hill overlooking Gilboa Conesville School is known as Stevens Mountain, named after some of the area's early settlers. I was fortunate in acquiring a copy of a letter written by a descendent of Gershom Stevens, dated May 10, 1922, that I found to be quite interesting.

The letter follows.

Dear Hatiette:

You will find enclosed or soon receive an assignment to me of all your right, title and interest in the Manorkill Falls and ravine situated in Schoharie County, New York, together with all right, title, and interest you may have in any claim against the City of New York by virtue of the city's appropriation of those lands and water rights. Will you please be kind enough to sign this document before a Notary Public.

In requesting you to relinquish your rights in this family estate, I feel it due you to acquaint you quite fully with the facts leading up to this request. You are scattered from the Atlantic Seaboard to the Pacific Coast, and a good many of you have never visited the old home nor seen the property in question. In fact, I doubt if all of you of the sixth generation have even heard of the Manorkill Falls or know the early history of your ancestors.

The Stevens family, for three generations, lived in Stratford, Connecticut prior to the birth of our great-great-grandfather, Colonel Gershom Stevens, in 1741. His father was a farmer, gunsmith, and blacksmith by trade, which did not prevent him from being a man of property and a gentleman.

Gershom Stevens learned all the trades of his father, but being of an adventurous disposition, volunteered when a mere boy, in the French and Indian War. Then he took to seafaring, but when still a young man, became prosperous enough to purchase a valuable farm near that of his father, marry Phoebe Henry, and settle down. But not for long: Indian raids in New Hampshire demanded his services, and then the revolution.

He volunteered as a private for the battle of Bunker Hill. He organized a party of thirty who made a daring attack on a British prison on Long Island, and rescued several officers—for this he was made an officer himself. He was one of four survivors of sixty men who responded to a call for reinforcement



by George Washington at Valley Forge, the rest having died of cold and starvation in a blizzard on the way. (His most notable achievement, however, was the iron cable which spanned the Hudson River at Poughkeepsie to keep the British out. He superintended the construction of this great cable, one link of which, weighing 300 pounds, may be seen today in the education building in Albany. At the end of the war he was ranked as Colonel.)

At the declaration of independence, Gershom Stevens with many other patriots had sold his farm and invested all he could raise in the new American securities, to help establish credit in the government. The home where he had placed his family was burned by the British. In 1791, with his perfectly good money of the United States, he bought a large tract of land in Schoharie County (then a part of Albany) New York and moved his family there. Here he lived until his death in 1825, when the property was willed to his two sons, Gershom Jr. and Peter.

For many years it remained undivided, the two brothers running the farm and jointly operating, with their sons and hired help, a sawmill, a gristmill, a shingle and turning factory, and a tannery, all by water power from the Manorkill. It is the testimony of one of these sons (my great uncle Philander) that "boys of such fathers did not have an easy time."

Later Gershom and Peter stood in the barn door (which was pointed out to me a number of years ago) and divided the property verbally between them. The Stevens brothers settled upon a division which gave Stevens Mountain (still so called) to Peter, and the lower lands, with the Manorkill Ravine and Falls to Gershom. These falls were called Stevens Falls for many years but were later known by the name of the stream, Manorkill. The division would seem to commit Peter and sons to agriculture and Gershom and sons to mills and tannery. The property was wisely divided so as to keep the water power intact. The Peter Stevens branch of the family has always been designated as the "Mountain Stevens." Many of them settled in Sullivan County in a place known today as Stevensville. The Gershom Stevens descendants are called the "Falls Stevens"! We are "Falls Stevens" (Stevenses?) and it is with the falls we are concerned.

It might be well for the benefit of those of you who have never seen the falls to give you some idea of them. I will not undertake to convey to you their natural beauty. They are one of the finest bits of scenery in the Catskills. Summer visitors come from Stamford and other summer resorts to view them and climb from the lower basin along the side of the ravine to the ruins of the old mill at the top.

The Manorkill, fed by the purest of mountain springs, flows into a ravine, or gorge, through solid rock. It descends, in a series of five cascades,

about 125 feet. The last two cascades are known as the upper falls and the lower falls, the latter of which is about 80 feet high. The volume of water depends on the season. During a drought the springs feed little water into the Manorkill, but in spring the stream, swollen by melting snow, often becomes a torrent, which precipitates itself over the rocks, filling the ravine and hurling trees and boulders from its bank, plunges into the Schohariekill with a roar that can be heard in the village of Gilboa.

That Gershom Stevens (Jr.) knew the value of water power, was evidenced by the way he jealously guarded the ravine and falls in conveying farm lands. He made no deed to property which crossed the ravine or included any part of it. In one deed of property on the south side, he granted permission for a dam to be built and the water of the upper falls to be used, provided that if diverted, it should be turned back into the stream before going over the lower falls.

This concession does not read to "heirs and assigns forever" as does a similar concession to my Grandfather Ozias Stevens in a deed giving a 1/4 interest in a tannery. Another 1/4 interest in this tannery with dam and water rights was also given my great-uncle Alanson. These two eldest sons were twenty-eight and twenty-three years old respectively. Whether Gershom Stevens (Jr.) had reserved the other half interest in this tannery for younger sons is not known, for he died suddenly without will in 1848 and his estate descended to his widow, eight sons, and three daughters.

At least one attempt was made to get the property into the hands of a single heir. Jason was selected to be the conduit for all the quit-claims, but the effort fell through, and later, when land on the north side of the ravine was sold, the whole family, including the widow Abigail, sons and daughters, sons' wives, and daughters' husbands signed the deed. The name Phoebe Ann does not appear (I wonder why) nor that of Elizabeth, who had died at the early age of twenty-eight.

The family preserved the policy of their father in reserving the ravine and water power, and "went him one better." In addition to reserving an acre at the foot of the lower falls on the north side for a mill (as he had done on the south side) and trusting to the law that boundary to a stream gives no riparian rights, they made their deed read "to within six rods of the Manorkill only," and thus retained the sole right to stand on the bank and fish for speckled brook trout which flashed in the clear water of the stream.

Later, all the family but my grandfather, Ozias, left Gilboa. Water power became obsolete with the invention of the steam engine, and the Manorkill for many years fell over the series of precipices unmolested and unused. Then a neighbor on the south side, having looked at the falls for so long, began to claim them for the scenery. She had postal cards made of them and

changing their name to her own family appellation, sent them out as representing her property. The community did not accept the name, and her ownership was anything but undisputed. Aunt Hattie, my mother's youngest sister, the only member of the family left in Gilboa, still occupied the old homestead. She never allowed the community to lose sight of our ownership of the falls, and contested the claims of the pretender, with a great deal of spirit. On one occasion, at least, she had help in her contention. In August of 1901 my grandfather's brother, Philander of Brooklyn, came to Gilboa with the express determination of clearing the title to the falls. Accompanied by my mother, aunt Hattie, and myself, he visited the home of the neighbor referred to and gave her verbal notice that she was claiming our property. Her mother, whom we saw on this occasion, agreed with us. Uncle Philander died before completing the title or obtaining quit-claims and with his death also dies the last effort of that generation to accomplish this task.

Again water power came into its own. Niagara, through the agency of electricity, began to turn cogs and wheels, light distant cities, and run street cars. I trusted that someday, some member of our family would get a clear title to our valuable water power, but I hesitated to undertake so difficult a task myself. Meanwhile the falls became evermore valuable as the country built up and the price of coal advanced, and I knew that however fast the Manorkill ran, it could not run away.

And now we read the final chapter in the story of the Manorkill. On the third day of June, 1905, an act of the legislature was passed, entitled, "an act to provide for an additional supply of pure and wholesome water for the city of New York." Permission was given for the acquisition of lands and for the construction of necessary reservoirs, dams, filter, and other appurtenances for that purpose. Investigations on Schoharie Creek led to the abandonment of one dam after another until a satisfactory site was found at the village of Gilboa. The property in the whole valley was condemned and taken in 1917, property owners receiving such award for damages as a commission appointed for that purpose deemed fair. The right to quit-claim, or to develop or to sell the falls, passed from the Stevens family forever.

We are entitled to damages for the loss of our property, but in five years no claimant has appeared to sue for an award.

I had not been to Gilboa in twelve years, but could no longer shirk the responsibility of providing for aunt Hattie when she was forced to give up her home. It would be tedious to relate my efforts to establish her happily. I bought a house and sold it when it seemed impractical for her to occupy it. I engaged board for her in Stamford, near her doctor and friends, but for the present she prefers to live with a cousin, Mrs. Charles Whitney, at South Gilboa, rather than go among strangers and be further from Gilboa. Alas—.

Gilboa, when New York City first came upon the scene, was a veritable Sleepy Hollow of the Catskills, named for euphonious reasons (probably) it capped no mount but reposed in primitive tranquility on a shelf along the Schohariekill.

One long street remained practically unchanged for a hundred years. The same elms, grown great, gave gothic shade; the same white houses with green blinds, hermetically sealed in front, hospitably open at the side, stood close to picket fences; and the same cats—or lineal descendants—adorned the headstones of long departed souls. And now the village, its trees felled, houses unpainted and dilapidated, gardens grown rank with weeds, but awaits the final hour of demolition. Huge derricks rise from rose gardens, buckets of rock swing across the valley, tram cars of gravel run up one hill, down another; Stevens Mountain under hydraulic pressure from the Manorkill is being washed down, its rock blasted for the dam itself and seven hundred laborers work days and all night by electricity to complete the reservoir within the seven-year contract.

Where gentle people were wont to sit in the quiet of their gardens, foreigners talk loudly in strange tongues, and New York City uniformed police patrol the town and seem as great an anachronism as a traffic light in the Sahara Desert.

Aunt Hattie's home in Gilboa was a kind of antique museum of which she was justly proud. She would show you the old burying ground, where five generations of the family rested with the monument to Colonel Stevens inscribed "a hero of the revolution."

Through the front door, whose brass knocker painted fast spoke mutely of more ceremonious days, she would usher you into the parlor, opened for occasional callers, where our great-great-grandmother's piano stood, like a boxed-in harp on end, and where our great grandfather's snuff box still lay on the center table. She would show you many old treasures and perhaps dress up for you in costumes of sixty years ago that she wore when she was young.

But her chief delight lay in her garden. Here blossoms of every native variety shared ground with current bushes and fruit trees. Early daffodils and chrysanthemums marked the season, and morning glories and four-o'clocks told the time of day.

Thus lived aunt Hattie, between her memories of the past on the one side and her "green things growing" on the other. Small wonder that she can call no other place home. Her trees killed, her treasures sacrificed, her dead violated, and every association of a lifetime broken. I fear I will never be able to console her, or prevent her from lamenting bitterly, the sadness of her lot.

For several years I have realized that the task of establishing the Stevens

claim to the Manorkill Falls devolved upon me, if such a claim were ever made. But circumstances have combined to prevent my giving the matter the requisite attention. My mother, Amelia Stevens Robinson, was an invalid for many years. Three years ago she met with a terrible accident, which took me to Florida on numerous journeys winter and summer until her death a year ago last June.

She had worried over aunt Hattie and I had determined to make her my special care as the last office I could perform for my dear mother. The following summer was devoted principally to locating her and providing for her belongings. Only the last year have I been free seriously to undertake the Stevens claim.

Under the guidance of our cousin, Frederick J. Davis, Attorney, of Oswego, New York, without whose help I could not have proceeded, I searched the records of Schoharie and Albany and in other ways assembled data which I could present as a case.

I retained a lawyer at Albany, who reported last January that while the Stevens family had evidently owned the property I claimed, missing deeds prevented our taking the claims to court with any prospect of winning. He said it was a case of the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. Knowing the family as I did I could not believe that my careful progenitor, who had displayed such sagacity in preserving the water power for his descendants, could have destroyed any legal documents. After much correspondence, I think I have located the "missing deeds" with a distant cousin, a descendent of the "Mountain Stevenses," who writes that strangely enough he has deeds to the old undivided property extending back to 1791 and quit-claim deeds from the brothers to each other. He has offered me every help in his power and will go over the property with me if I come to Gilboa. I do not feel justified in proceeding further without your cooperation. The expert title searcher who has made my abstract from the records, met with a fatal automobile accident. It will be necessary to engage a new one, as well as a lawyer, an hydraulic engineer and perhaps a surveyor. And I must present myself in court as a single claimant.

My first plan was to have you assign your interests to aunt Hattie as a natural claimant, not only because she has been the one to suffer by the reservoir, but because she has kept the home fires burning and, owing to her disposition to preserve everything, has saved old documents without which our proof would be incomplete. But aunt Hattie is old and feeble, the mere thought of a lawsuit frightens her. She has turned the old papers over to me to do with as I wish. I hold her power of attorney, invest her money, and pay her bills. She would but turn over any award she received

to me. And in any case, I promise you all that, should her meager income not meet her needs, I will never let her want for anything. But I am not going to ask you to quit-claim to me whatever interest you may have in the property or in a damage suit against New York City, on sentimental grounds, or because of aunt Hattie. I will make you a fair business proposition. If, after further examination I find that apparently we have legal title to any land or water rights along the Manorkill, I will proceed with the prosecution of the suit, providing all the heirs quit-claim their right, title, and interest to me. If the suit is unsuccessful and no award is made, I will pay all expenses of the suit and all examinations of the title and interest in the lands that are involved. On the other hand if I am successful in the prosecution of the suit, I agree to take fifty percent of the award, whatever that may amount to, and from the other fifty percent I will deduct a reasonable amount for expenses, including the search of title and counsel fees, and divide the remainder among the several heirs according to the laws of inheritance of this state.

Just what I can prove is a question I can not answer at present. The old deeds were not recorded and some are perhaps lost. Our neighbor on the south has tried to establish claim to part of the property which I think rightfully belongs to us. A competent searcher must study out this title, obscured as it is by the cob webs of the past. As that neighbor has presented her claim to the commission, it is important that we be in a position to dispute that claim before the award is handed down. I beg of you to sign these papers and send to the next heir on the list, as speedily as possible.

Within two years, Stevens Mountain, noble monument to a family, will be leveled, its rocks used for Schoharie Dam, and the waters of the Manorkill will be flowing on their long journey to New York. But we should be compensated for the loss of these relics by our pride in belonging to a race that can accomplish such titanic achievements as leveling a mountain, turning a stream backwards in its course, and digging a tunnel 18 miles long.

Of Colonel Gershom Stevens and his sons, their lives, activities, and deaths, soon a rising reservoir will efface all traces from land, but may we not preserve for the seventh generation now appearing these traditions of the family?

Thanking all of you who have assisted me with addresses and encouragement in my undertaking and hoping to hear favorably from the rest of you, I am very cordially your cousin.

Juna L. Penworth

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## THE BARN AT THE STEVENS HOMESTEAD

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*Beatrice Mattice, Town of Conesville Historian*

In the previous letter, Juna L. Penworth wrote of the family of Gershom Stevens settling his family on a large tract of land in 1825. This land is around the present-day Waterfall House, and the barn was across the street. I checked my records again and found that Gershom Stevens Sr. may have come earlier to Conesville, in 1805.

He had many children including Gershom Jr. who we know lived in the subject house and barn, but I don't know whether Senior or Junior built the buildings. They had mills across the road by the Manorkill Falls, and the property stayed in the Stevens family for many years—it was owned by L. H. Stevens in 1866.

Rene Brownell farmed there for years in the early 1900s, and Franklin Hess bought it in 1941 or '42 and farmed it until the 1960s when it was sold to Daniel and Marian O'Brien. Mrs. O'Brien was still there in 2000, but several years ago it was sold to the Mattsson family who lived next door. The house had 14 rooms with a mansard roof, and was torn down about 2001. Recently the barn was also demolished.



Gershom Stevens farm near the Manorkill Falls. The home shown here was constructed by Rene Brownell and replaced the original Stevens house. Pictures from Joan Hess Mullins and in the Beatrice Mattice collection, 1990.



*Beatrice Mattice is the prolific historian for the Town of Conesville, has contributed to the New York Roots Web site, is the author of They Walked These Hills Before Me: An Early History of the Town of Conesville, and has written a number of articles and treatises. She has more information on the Stevens family on pages 117–120 of They Walked These Hills Before Me. 840009*



## POSTCARDS TO TREASURE

*Jake Browner*

**D**eltiology is the word that means the collection and study of postcards. I am by no means a deltiologist. I'm just a simple treasure hunter looking for clues to our great past. As any good metal detectorist will tell you, "You've got to know your history."

Sometimes it's quite easy to drive by a place that you know has a lot of foot traffic and know it'll be a good spot to check out with your

metal detector. Other times a friend may say, "Ya know I heard there used to be a store right over there where that field is behind old man Parson's place." So you run over there after work to the field, metal detector in hand, not knowing where to start and you begin searching the two-acre field, using all the techniques you've learned over the years and the next thing you know, it's dark and you're pooped. Then after checking your meager finds you surmise that maybe you started in the wrong place after all. Sometimes information isn't even available on new sites so you head down to the beach and hope you get lucky.

Well, to get the odds more in my favor I use postcards. My mom had turned her collection of postcards over to me a few years ago and being an army brat her collection ranged from Fort Riley, Kansas to Fort Totten, New York in addition to cards from overseas. As I sat there marveling at the different views that were represented and had chuckles over the notes on the back, I suddenly realized I was seeing history as it was in this case, up to ninety years ago.

My first clue was a postcard of a place I knew, or thought I did. It was Middleburgh Central School. Hey, I went to school at good ol' MCS but it sure didn't look like this. The postcard was dated 1909 and the building was a totally different structure. By matching up trees and houses I was able to



Postcard of Middleburgh High School ca 1909. Note the recess area at the left corner and under the tree to the right. These are good spots to detect for hidden treasure. Postcard used courtesy of Land-Sea Discovery Group



locate the original site of the school and playgrounds. It was on the same acreage that the present school is now but in a different position. I also then did a time travel back to 1968 when somewhere on the grounds I lost my high school ring and made a mental note that I would have to get back home soon to metal detect the school yard.

I found postcards very interesting and I think you will too. The first widely distributed postcards were of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. They were used as souvenir items that were catching on very quickly in the United States. Postcards had been the fad in Europe years before. In 1898 the Private Mailing Card Act opened the U.S. market to great competition for publishers who created the cards. They offered pictures of places that were called views, along with holiday greetings, artists' renditions, and topicals, which could be a picture of just about anything from alligators to zeppelins.

From the late 1890's to the early 1920's collecting postcards was the rage in America. Although the population of the United States in 1908 was only 88 million people, over 677 million cards were mailed! These small, 3.5 x 5.5", picture cards offer up to us our history and heritage with every viewing.

What should you look for? I recommend looking first for view cards that depict an area you are familiar with. More than likely you'll find postcards dating from the present back to 100 years ago. You can then match up these views against each other or against what you know to exist now in these same locations. Lots of times the postcards depict happier times and places like parks, picnics, and places of interest. Today's postcards may depict the same places but the spots people congregate in may be different. Are you getting the idea?

## WHERE TO FIND POSTCARDS

1. Postcard shows and conventions
2. Modern postcard specialty stores
3. Antique stores
4. Barr's News & Postcard Collector Magazine
5. Collectable stores
6. Flea markets, swap meets, and estate sales

I search specifically for real photo postcards, which was a process where an actual photo was taken and printed with a postcard back. One real photo card I found while browsing through a section marked "San Gabriel Mountains" shows two vacationers writing on the porch of their holiday cabin at a place called Roberts Camp. Through further research I found out that the camp had accommodations for up to 180 guests with a two-story lodge, 24 cabins, and even more tent sites to boot. The guest register of the camp, I

recently found out, contained the signatures of 5000 guests in the year 1919. To me it was indeed a lost treasure hunt just to find the site of Roberts Camp and when I did my work was rewarded well with coins, buttons, and an old fork that had a carved ivory handle.

Another bonus you get with postcards is you don't necessarily have to buy them. They are put on display with the hope you will buy but you are allowed to browse, in fact most dealers will offer you a chair to sit in while you look. If you do decide to purchase a postcard you could spend anywhere from \$1.00 to \$100.00 per card. Most cards are reasonably priced from \$2–3.00. Many dealers have bargain boxes that contain unsorted cards from 25 to 50 cents apiece. Many dealers also offer approval services that will send you cards in your specific category and if you want them you simply mail them the payment asked for. If you don't want them you can send them back. You must however pay the postage.

When you first come across a postcard show or a dealer selling cards you'll probably be overwhelmed. I was. Here were millions of little treasure clues just waiting to be plucked out of the haystack. A show is usually made up of a number of dealers each having one or two tables and on the tables they've displayed their postcards for you to see. Each dealer can have thousands of postcards on display. The view cards are usually filed by country, state, county, and in their specialized areas, by city. A dealer that wants to sell cards will have a nice display of organized cards and the cards will be properly priced on the back in pencil. Be sure to ask if the dealer has anything special set aside behind the table. They may have large photos, brochures, and other ephemera worth looking at.

If you happen to come across a batch of postcards at a garage sale or estate sale, chances are the seller knows less than you about the cards themselves, the dates, or the values. Pay only what the card is worth to you. To date a postcard, first check the back for a copyright date or a postmark. Sometimes the cards were never mailed so look to see how much postage was required. That can narrow down a date. You can also judge the date by the clothes people are wearing or the cars they are driving. If a flag is waving in the background you could try to count the stars on the flag to date the picture.

So just pull up a chair and start in. Check out the state you're interested in and the city. Take notes if you like. Some other categories to check under are disasters, train wrecks, train depots, ships and shipwrecks, buildings, expositions, fairs, and amusement parks. Actually the list could go on for ever, just use your imagination and have fun. Now that one of my secrets is out of the bag I hope to see more treasure hunters at the postcard shows along side the deltiologists.

Please be sure to check your local laws before diving into an area for metal detecting. Many areas are unfortunately off limits and other areas will require permission first.

*Jack Brouwer's name might ring a few bells with Schoharie County friends as he graduated from Middleburgh Central School in 1968. He is now involved in the Land - Sea Discovery Group, whose primary function is the discovery, rediscovery, and distribution of the world's big and small treasures—to move these treasures to where they will be most appreciated through sales, preservation for future generations, in graphics, and with the written word. <http://www.e-adventure.net/>*

*Source Documentation for [www.e-adventure.net/land/treasure/postcards.html](http://www.e-adventure.net/land/treasure/postcards.html)*

1. Diane Allmen, *Postcards the Official Price Guide, House of Collectables, 1990.*
2. John W. Robinson, *The San Gabriels, Big Santa Anita Historical Society, 1991.*
3. Author's personal experiences.

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## **An Evening with Abe Lincoln**

*Peter Lindeman*

President Abraham Lincoln will address the Gilboa Historical Society on Wednesday, March 19, 2014.

Peter Lindemann of Cobleskill, portraying the president, says “This year we mark the sesquicentennial of the bloodiest year of the Civil War. The die was cast the year before when Lincoln vowed that this nation ‘shall not perish from the earth.’”

Come hear President Lincoln talk about his rise from a log cabin to the White House and recall the tragedy and humor along the way. Afterward, you may never look at larger-than-life icons in the same way.

**Carpool a Friend**  
**Wednesday, March 19 at 7:00**  
**Gilboa Town Hall, 373 Route 990V**

**A Surprise Speaker—TBA**  
**Wednesday, April 16 at 7:00**  
**Gilboa Town Hall, 373 Route 990V**

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## ORRIN CURTIS' WORLD IN 1863

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Two monumental events occurred on July 4, 1863: the Battle of Gettysburg ended, and the Confederate fortress at Vicksburg capitulated. These two events shaped the next year and a half of Orrin's life.

### *Gettysburg*

In the Eastern theater, the battle of Gettysburg was a three-day battle that started on July 1. Orrin Curtis' regiment was pivotal in the first two days, suffering 42 killed, 151 wounded, and 59 missing—a total of 252 men out of 400 in two days of action. (See “The 134th N.Y.S.V. at Gettysburg.”)

The Battle of Gettysburg is often considered the war's turning point with Meade's Union forces defeating Lee's Confederates. In total, 166,000 soldiers were involved (the 6th largest concentration of the war), and 46,000 of them were casualties (the highest number in any battle). It had the highest rate of loss in any battle of the war (28%), and neither side apparently had the energy to start further significant activity in the Eastern theater for the rest of 1863.

### *Vicksburg*

In the West, Grant's Army of the Tennessee had doggedly driven the Confederate Army of Vicksburg into defensive lines surrounding the fortress city, and then used siege tactics to starve the city into submission. On July 4, 1863, after 40 days, the Vicksburg garrison surrendered.

On October 16, 1863, Grant was named Commander of the West and wrote Sherman: “Drop all work . . . cross the Tennessee, and hurry eastward with all possible dispatch toward Bridgeport, till you meet further orders from me.” On his arrival, Grant appointed Sherman to command the Army of the Tennessee. Later that year, after a series of grinding battles toward Chattanooga, Grant was named Commander of All Union Armies.

To Grant's mind, there were three targets to destroy: Lee's Army; Johnston's Army; and the line of communications between Richmond and Tennessee through the Shenandoah Valley. Grant's solution was simple—he consolidated all 17 departments of the army into 3 parts: his Army of the Potomac to take on Lee; Sherman's mounted infantry to use its speed to out-manoeuvre Johnston and then race through Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, and the Carolinas; and Sheridan's Cavalry Corps using guerilla techniques and burn the Shenandoah Valley. Three strong units for three goals.

## The 134th N.Y.S.V. at Gettysburg

In <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/07/02/>, “A Regiment Is Sacrificed at Gettysburg,” Ronald S. Coddington analyzed the battle.

A federal division commander in the thick of the fray, Gen. Carl Schurz, was sore-pressed and requested reinforcements. Nearby, the ranking Union general at first declined to send reserves but finally ordered a brigade to assist the beleaguered Schurz. He sent a weakened brigade of four undersized regiments of Pennsylvanians and New Yorkers (including the 134th) under the command of Charles R. Coster, colonel of the 134th.

About 4 P.M., Coster formed his brigade with the 134th in front, and led it down the gentle slope of Cemetery Hill. Then the federals marched in double-quick time into the streets of Gettysburg, where the little column moved against a rising tide of wounded and retreating soldiers. Coster pulled up near the railroad depot, where he detached one of his regiments, the 73rd Pennsylvania Infantry, and posted it in reserve. He continued forward with the 134th and the other two regiments.

Meanwhile, Schurz’s troubles had intensified. The Union right had broken and troops there were steadily losing ground. His position was about to be overrun by rebels. Schurz needed time—only a few precious minutes—to withdraw his men to the relative safety of Cemetery Hill. He needed someone to cover him, but no one was around. At this critical moment he met Coster and his brigade.

“I led it out of the town, and ordered it to deploy on the right of the junction of the roads near the railroad depot, which the enemy was fast approaching,” explained Schurz in his after-action report. Coster’s brigade was about to be sacrificed for the greater good.

A Confederate officer later praised the federals in his official battle report. He observed “the enemy stubbornly held their position until we had climbed over into their midst.” Godwin’s forces caught the New Yorkers in cross-fire from three sides and slaughtered them where they stood. The regiment disintegrated as the Confederates had driven away or captured the rest of the regiment and rolled into Gettysburg.

The sacrifice of Coster’s brigade bought Schurz about 20 minutes. The general credited the brigade in his after-action report for checking the enemy advance long enough to allow his troops to complete the retreat through town.

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## LETTERS OF ORRIN B. CURTIS PART II

*Starting 23 July 1863 and Ending 22 April 1864.*

*Drummer in the 134th Regt. N. Y. S. V.*

*During a Three Year Enlistment at the Time of the Civil War.*

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These letters are the property of Mr. and Mrs. Carl Eklund, of Blenheim Hill, present owners of the Wood home.

Orrin B. Curtis was born 11 Sept. 1834, the son of Benjamin Curtis and Elinor Kien. He married Lydia Ploss, and died 28 April 1911, aged 76 years.

The last letter in the December issue of the Newsletter had been post-marked Hope Landing, March 6th, 1863—we have no letters recounting the events of the 134th at Chancellorsville or Gettysburg. The next letter we have is six months later, postmarked Sharon Centre in upstate New York.

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Sharon Centre, Sept. 10, '63

Dear Brother,

I take this opportunity to inform you and our folks that I am in good health and engaged in pulling poles at Mr. Beakley's hopyard. I shall be engaged during next week, when I shall probably leave for some other parts, where, I have not decided.

Please give me all the news & answer immediately. I wish some advice about what course to pursue etc. Write all you can hear from the boys of the 134th.

Yours in haste  
O. B. Curtis

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Sharon Springs, Dec. 20th, 1863

Dear Brother and friends

This eve finds me at the above named place in good health and all right. I suppose you are all anxious to know where I am so I will relieve your anxiety. I am at work about one mile from the springs but do not know how long I shall stay here, but probably long enough to receive an answer from

you if you don't delay too long. There is a good chance for teaching singing schools in this section and I should go into it under different circumstances. Wages are 6 and 8 shillings per day and wood chopping  $5\frac{1}{2}$  per cord.

I am expecting a letter from the army directed to you. I saw a soldier from the 134 while on my way here who said that the drum major (Talmage from Charlotteville) was home on a furlough and he should return with him and write to me when he arrived. I do not know of much to interest you, so if there is anything you want to know about write and I will try to gratify you.

You and Lydia and Steve must write me all the news. Do not be afraid of a little time, paper and ink, but write all the news from the army and at home. Please answer immediately.

My love to all of our folks. Yours affectionately

O. B. Curtis

Confidential.

Inclosed you will find a letter. Please forward it and mail the answer if possible and I will be a thousand times obliged to you.

O. B. Curtis

P.S. How does Nathan get along and all the rest of my good friends? Where is Nellie Wood etc., etc.

Sharon Springs, Feb. 9th, 1864

Dear Brother and Sister,

I take this opportunity to write a few lines to let you know that I am yet alive and in tolerable health. I have not seen Henry pedalling his patent rights in Sharon yet but I wish I could for I want to see you very much. I am tired of this kind of life, and would like to have things all right and feel free, I would like to find out where Joel Warner is and I could write to him. Find out by Mr. Warner if you can and let me know. I feel lonesome among strangers away from all of my old acquaintances. Henry sometimes I wish I was back with Henry Creighton and Stanton. Where are all the boys. Give me all the particulars. Give my love to father & Mother. Tell father to do the best he can for my interest with my business matters and if

he wants any instructions to write and I will answer. I would like to know what shape Smith left business in. I would like to have my singing books taken care of. In fact I am most homesick today and want to know the particulars about everything. I do not know what to do about spending the summer in Sharon. I am offered 10—\$1.25 per day all summer to lay wall & be boarded. I am undecided what to do. Every thing is quiet. Give me your advice. My love to you all.

Yours in affection.

O. B. Curtis

Lydia, keep this ring for me.

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Sharon Springs Mar. 1st, '64

Dear Brother and Sister

I rec'd two letters yesterday, one dated Feb. 10th and one the 17th. You directed them to the wrong office and I am sorry I did not receive them before. I am very anxious to hear from Margaret and would like to see her. I have answered Capt. Dart's letter and shall forward it tomorrow. Wages are high in these parts 20 and 26 dollars per month on the farm. One fellow of my acquaintance has hired to a man in Conn, for \$30 per month. I have not made up my mind what to do this summer yet. You will probably see me before long and then I will talk over the particulars with you. If any letters come to the office for me after this reaches you, keep them 'till I see you. Try and find out where Joel is if you can. I shall see what I can do before I come home so I will be prepared to tell what to do. No more at present.

From your affectionate brother

Orrin

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Camp 134th N. Y. Vol. Infy.  
 Lookout Valley, Tenn.  
 March 4th, 1864

Mr. O. B. Curtis

Sir—I had the pleasure of receiving a letter yesterday signed Henry Wood P. H. in reply to a note to Orrin B. Curtis by myself. I believe I



stated plainly in that letter that Curtis could come back to his Regt. without fear of punishment. He can also draw back pay. I have the Col's assurance that no harm will be done him and that he may remain a drummer. I understand full well the cause of his being left at Gettysburg and was very much surprised when heard he had deserted. For surely he had no reason or cause to commit so deep a crime. His position in this Regt. was one of comparative ease beside the labor of his comrades bearing arms. His Father cannot buy him off it is impossible. As a friend to Curtis and since the Responsibility of the Company has been placed in my hands, I sent him the note by Starkens in Order should he wish to save his name that he might return to his command with safety so far as punishment is concerned by his commanding Officer. His name has not been published as a deserter nor will he be dropped from the Rolls during this month if heard to be on the way, to join his company. I do not wish you to think that his coming back to the company is any benefit to me, for it is noted the only one to be benefitted is himself. My advice to every deserter is to return, the time is not far distant when they will all repent of their crime. This war cannot last forever and when our Soldiers again return to their homes there will be but little mercy Shown those who proved false to their country. A deserter is no more safe after the war is over than at the present time. Ten years hence or fifty he can be made to suffer a severe penalty. Therefore if you wish to save Curtis from his embarrassment send back at once. I have written this to Henry Wood as his was the only signature to the other.

I am sir

Very Respectfully Your  
Obt. Servt.  
J. Monroe Dart  
Capt. Co. E.

---

Gettysburg, April 20th, 1864

Dear Brother and Friends.

I am now in the house where I left my drum, and in sight of the battlefield, which awakens sad memories of the past. My drum is gone. It was taken away by some of the drum corps. The rest of my things are here, but they cost all they are worth. I stayed all night at Harrisburg last night and shall stay here tonight & start back tomorrow at 6 P.M. I will give you a short history of my travels. I got to South Gilboa some time

before the stage came along. At Gilboa, a N. S. Peaslee & O. J. Spring got into the stage and rode to Catskill. They were not very sociable neither was I. I think they thought I was not going back. Olney J. gave once in a while a slur, but whether he meant them for me or not I did not know or care, for I had his change ready. I got in Catskill barely in time to take the boat for N. Y., and had to run at that & I regret that I could not see Margaret. Saw Jessie Brockway and John Avery on the boat. Arrived in the city at daylight—took the cars at 10 o'clock in Jersey City & arrived at Harrisburg last night, stayed all night, & came here & shall start again tomorrow morning & shall crowd through as fast as I can. I have had rather a pleasant passage. I saw Lute Heed of Co. E who was wounded at Gettysburg. He said he would swear he saw Wesley Vroman go back a prisoner for Wes gave him a canteen of water as he lay on the field. The people are plowing and sowing in Penn. and the grass begins to look quite green. I have been asked no questions except when buying my ticket, whether I had a furlough? If I had it would not cost me half as much. My funds are half gone and I do not know whether they will hold out or not. When they fail I shall call on the Provost off. asst. for transportation. I think it will come out all right. Give my love to all true friends.

Yours with esteem,  
Orrin

April 21st, 2 P.M.

I am seated in the cars at Harrisburg ready to start to Pittsburgh.

Yours in haste.

Orrin.

**Diary. Please save it for me after reading.**

Lookout valley Wednesday May 4th, 1864 4 o'clock P.M. commenced our march, bivouacked on the road to Rossville 6 miles from camp. Marching seems natural but comes rather tough. Changed drums with Chas. Bramen.

5th. Sung with Orderleys Haley & Payne. Payne passed examination for a commissioned officer in a negro regt. Marched at 8 A.M. slowly & bivouacked 12 M. from Lookout mountain. The 27th Penn., whose time is

out, refused to go farther without special orders of war department, which were read.

6th. Bugle sounded reveille at 3 A.M., marched at 5 stopped at 8 A.M. sing in shade of a tree in Geo. with Payne & N. Youngs, between Ringold & La Fayette.

7th. Started toward Frederick at 6 A.M. Passed a tan factory & mill. Warm dusty marching. Made coffee at 12 M., cross mountains at Gordon's springs the Saratoga of the South. Marched toward Tunnell hill & Dalton. Formed line of battle in woods.

8th. Think of friends at home. How few realize the uncertainty & brevity of human life. Sold revolver for 20 dollars to Lieut. Chas. Taylor. Brigade moved to & charged Mill creek mountain and fell back. Orderly Payne Co. E. killed by ball in head. N. Hallock also killed.

May 9th. All is quiet. 130 wounded in 2nd Brigade 2nd Div. 20th Corps. The wounded are being removed. Hospital broke up at 2 P.M. 134th Regt. lost 11 killed & 24 wounded. Regt. went on picket. Drum corps ordered to the rear at midnight. Our troops worked all night on breastworks.

10th. Cooked breakfast, rains, took quarters in a log shanty. Stayed all night. Saw reb camp fires on mountain. Rain fell in torrents & stopped our men building works.

11th. Our regt. goes out on picket at 7 A.M. Doct. Murphy, Lieuts. Porter, Co. E. & Joshland Co. A., Geo. Judd stayed all night with us. Heavy firing in the P. M. toward Buzzards roost.

12th. Pickett relieved by 1st Battalion Cav. Army Cumberland. Marched south, passed Dug gap & camped beyond the breastworks at 9 P.M. Country mountainous, roads rough, nights cold & chilly.

13th. All is quiet omeneing a battle near. Large bodys of troops are passing continually. Reports "Gen. Howard in possession of Dalton rebs surrounded" etc. 20th Corps between Resaca & Calhoun. Skirmishing in front & cannonading. Moved to the breastworks, facing N.E. obliquely from front.

14th. Rec'd, a dispatch from Gen. Grant of the capture of a division of rebs at Spotsylvania C. H. Va. & 30 pieces of cannon. Skirmishing continues. The rebs mean we shall attack them in their works. 20th Corps move to the left to relieve the 4th (Howards) at 11 at night.

15th. Got breakfast & followed the 134th Saw Genls. Sickles, Scofield, Thomas A. Whipple. 1 P.M. moved our Brigade to the front, charged over 2 or 3 lines of battle on the rebs & got where they could not advance or retreat, for the sharp shooters got a crossfire on them, but they were sheltered by a hill. Were relieved about midnight, when the rebs charged to cover their retreat. 8 wounded, none killed. Lieut. Chas. Arets hit slightly in head.

16th. Rebs falling back toward Atlantic. Hooker crossed a small river in pursuit. Drum corps left hospital. Found 40 or 50 wounded rebs at railroad unable to be removed. Overtook regt. at river, crossed & camped. Had a turkey & some smoked meat. Old lady quite independent. "Had worked hard for living would leave her place for nobody." Had 4 or 5 girls.

17th. Some rainy. Marched P.M. 8 miles. Plenty of forage, tobacco, chickens, ducks, turkeys, sheep, etc. Reb cavalry left one hour in advance "reported capture of a reb wagon train." Had chicken for supper.

18th. Marched 20 miles, bivouacked at 9½ P.M. 5 miles of Kingston.

May 19th. Marched at 7 A.M. toward Kingston, almost constantly in woods. Took dinner 8 miles from Kingston. Heard firing. Threw out skirmishers, moved slowly, found 4th Corps on the right, "A division of rebs said to be surrounded." Expected to make a stand at Rome camped 1 mile from Resaca Cass Cr. Georgia.

20th. Rebs falling back after all said to be surrounded. Passed the day in camp, wrote a letter.

21st. Went fishing. Visited a large well finished house be. speaking wealth, but deserted by its occupants. Picked some roses,

Treason's blighting hand hath brought  
Sorrow & suffering for naught;  
Ambitious men their foolish pride to gratify,  
Thoughtless alike of widow's moan & orphan's cry;

The ruin rife that here bespeaks,  
 The avenging sword that justice reaks,  
 On traitors' heads, with vengeful eye,  
 Who our just law do dare defy.

O. B. Curtis, Cassville, Ga.

22nd. 16 months from today our time expires for Unkle Sam. Bushbeck our Brigade commander goes home tomorrow with his regt. 27th P.M.Vols. Al-  
 vah Warner is here, well, so are all of the boys. Those of my friends who  
 want a letter from me must write first.

Yours in friendship  
 O. B. Curtis

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*These letters will continue in the summer issue of the Newsletter.*

540048

## **Schoharie Valley “The Breadbasket of the Revolution”**

Kristen Van Houten Wyckoff is the guest speaker for the Gilboa Historical Society this May. Kristen grew up in Fultonham directly under Vroman's Nose Mountain and she will talk about the importance of the valley: the geological formation, the American Indians, but mostly the Revolution. Details from the Vroman's Land Massacre, and the “facts” not folklore on Timothy Murphy and his part in history.

She will have her mother Sylvia Van Houten's arrowhead collection on display after the lecture. Come and enjoy an evening with refreshments and if you have no idea why Tim Murphy is our local hero, you will find out. For those who enjoy hearing it over and over. . . . 7:00 pm after a short business meeting.

**Carpool a Friend  
 Wednesday, May 21 at 7:00  
 Gilboa Town Hall, 373 Route 990V**

## Desertion During the Civil War

Desertion was common on both sides during the Civil War as realities of combat had become clear. As Union armies penetrated further south, Confederate soldiers were especially susceptible to desertion after receiving letters from their desperate families urging them to return.

There are no firm figures: Northern estimates were that at least one soldier in five was AWOL at any one time, and post-war estimates were that 250,000 men had been absent from their units sometime during the war. Estimates for Confederate armies were higher—perhaps as many as one soldier in three deserted during the course of the war.

While desertion was a capital offense, it was politically impossible to execute every deserter. Armies needed live troops, not dead bodies, and the U.S. population would not allow Americans to be shot in great numbers.

Some captured deserters *were* executed, but only 147 Union deserters suffered this fate during the course of the war. Authorities instead wooed them back with offers of amnesty, and Lincoln granted amnesty to over 125,000 Union soldiers in March 1863. <sup>540067.1</sup>

### Proclamation 124

... Now, therefore, be it known that I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, do issue this my proclamation, as required by said act, ordering and requiring all deserters to return to their proper posts; and I do hereby notify them that all deserters who shall, within sixty days from the date of this proclamation, viz, on or before the 10th day of May, 1865, return to service or report themselves to a provost-marshal shall be pardoned, on condition that they return to their regiments and companies or to such other organizations as they may be assigned to and serve the remainder of their original terms of enlistment and in addition thereto a period equal to the time lost by desertion. In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed. Done at the city of Washington, this 11th day of March A.D. 1865, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty-ninth.

The surrender documents were signed in the Wilmer McLean house on April 9, 1865. On April 12, a formal ceremony marked the disbandment of the Army of Northern Virginia and the parole of its officers and men. This event triggered a series of surrenders ending the war. <sup>540067.2</sup>

Your name, address, and membership status appears on the label of the physical Newsletter: \* next to your name indicates a paid-up individual membership; likewise, \*\* indicates a paid-up couple's membership, and \*\*\* indicates a paid-up family. A single dagger † indicates lifetime membership and a double ‡ indicates a couple's lifetime membership. Please consider joining if you are not a member, and let us know if we have incorrect address information.

### Membership Application Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Subscription format: Physical  Electronic  Both

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address:\* \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

\* Please provide any temporary address for our mailings in early March, June, September, and December.

Seasonal address for mailings: Mar.  Jun.  Sep.  Dec.

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Total amount enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

† The Board has a "wish list" of memorial gifts: please inquire of a board member, and provide the complete wording of the dedication, your name and address, and the name and address of a next-of-kin to be notified.

**Gilboa Historical Society, Post Office Box 52, Gilboa, NY 12076**

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