



Headwaters of History

Making History in Delaware County ~ DCHA to Host Annual History Conference

Members of local historical societies, local historians, and members of the general public are invited to attend the Delaware County Historical Association's 2025 History Conference on Saturday, May 10 at 1pm. *Making History in Delaware County* is specifically designed for town and village historical societies of Delaware County. However, it is open to anyone with an interest in local history. There is no charge to attend.

For 2025 we are happy to host some of the new owners of Purple Mountain Press, a well-known Catskills publishing company. They will explain in which directions they plan to take their newly acquired publishing house and how they can collaborate with members of the local history community. We will also hear from DCHA's staff members as they continue their efforts to mark the 250th Anniver-

sary of the American Revolution, including our administration of grant money now available to repair and maintain Delaware County revolutionary war graves.

Additionally, and as always, there will be an opportunity for a general roundtable discussion on issues common to most of us involved in local history organizations. Attendees are asked to bring questions of concern for your organization, interesting ideas (what's worked, what hasn't?), as well as dates of planned events, and handouts which can be shared for cross-promoting.

We are looking forward to an informative and enjoyable afternoon and hope that you will be able to attend. **Advance registration is requested by May 7, 2025.** Please contact us via phone, letter or email.



Spring Bus Trip to Culinary Institute of America & Clermont Historic Site



Join DCHA on Thursday, **May 22** for a delightfully delicious and historic trip to the Hudson Valley. Travel with us to Hyde Park and the Culinary Institute of America's expansive campus along the Hudson River. There you can enjoy all the CIA has to offer, including an elegant three-course lunch in the Institute's own American Bounty Restaurant and an immersive educational experience in other parts of the facility.

After leaving the Culinary Institute our guests will travel to the beautiful and historic Clermont mansion (pictured) where they will receive a guided tour of the Livingston family's home and beautiful garden. Between 1730 and 1750, Robert Livingston Jr. built a grand brick and stone home on a hill alongside the Hudson River. Over the next 230 years, the



house underwent many changes, including a nearly complete rebuilding by Margaret Beekman Livingston after being burned by the British in 1777, and a remodeling in the Colonial Revival style in the 1920s. The house, its contents, and the grounds were given to the state in 1962. Today, the home appears

as it did in the 1930s, with furnishings that reflect all three centuries of the Livingston family's occupancy. Fine Empire period furniture is complemented by exquisite chandeliers, porcelain, and artwork. The surrounding grounds feature a walled garden, 1820s Lilac Walk, and a wilderness garden.

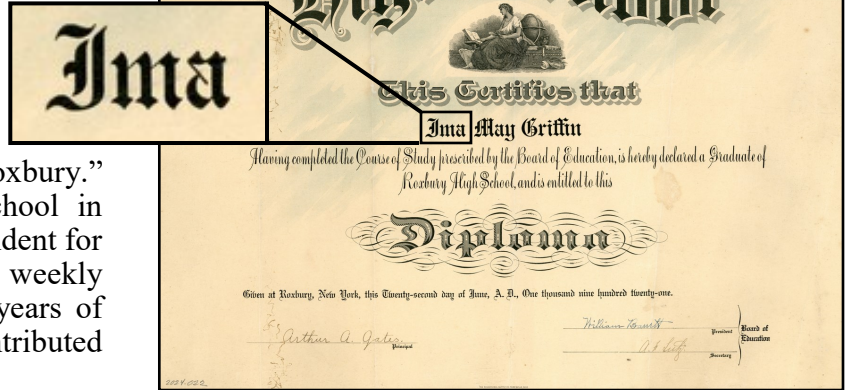
Cost: DCHA members \$165 / Non-members \$185. For further information or reservations call: (607) 746-3849 or email dchadelhi@gmail.com Reservations required by April 28.

From the Archives: Irma Mae Griffin of Roxbury

by Ray LaFever

We recently received material from the family of Irma Mae Griffin of Roxbury. Irma was a local historian for many years and wrote *The History of the Town of Roxbury* in 1953 (and rewrote and updated it in 1975).

Irma was born in the Vega-Denver area in 1903 and died at her home in Roxbury in 1987. She spent most of her life in Roxbury, becoming something of a Roxbury institution. Her obituary referred to her as “Miss Roxbury.” She graduated from the Roxbury High School in 1921 and later became the Roxbury correspondent for the local weekly newspapers, submitting her weekly columns until just before her passing. Her years of reporting the activities of her hometown contributed to the history she wrote.



The materials were donated to DCHA by Ann Eigner, widow of Jim Eigner. Jim was the son of Irma’s sister Mary Eigner.

Included in the materials was her 1921 Roxbury High School diploma with Irma’s first name misspelled. (pictured above)

Also in this accession was Irma’s amazing collection of political campaign buttons, from the 1904 Teddy Roosevelt election stretching all the way to Jimmy Carter in 1976! Most of the buttons are for presidential elections, but there is one for State Senator Dr. E. Ogden Bush, as well as buttons for NY Governor, Lt. Governor and U.S. Senator. (pictured left)



A Huge Thank You ...

To our members and friends who since the fall of 2024 have donated to our annual appeal. So far your generosity has enabled DCHA to raise \$12,700 for general operating expenses.

Do You Like Fresh Air?

We’re looking for volunteers to help mow our extensive grounds this summer. For many years Delaware County provided a crew to carry out this work. However, in 2025 this will no longer be the case. We will provide the mowing machines. Please give us a call or email if you are interested.



Save the Date June 21 & 22, 2025 Civil War Reenactment

Please join us in celebrating the return of the 144th New York State Volunteers as they form together to reenact three Civil War battles. Living History Exhibit, kids’ drill, artillery demo.

Admission: Adults - \$10
Military (retired or active) - \$5
DCHA members - \$5
Children 12 and under FREE

Revolutionary War Grave in Meredith

by Gabrielle Pierce

Most of our Delaware County Revolutionary War soldiers rest in various cemeteries throughout the county. Currently, Samantha Misa of DCHA is compiling a list of those burials as a way to honor our county's involvement in that war. Among other things, DCHA will produce a map of all known Revolutionary War burials in the county.

One example of a local veteran burial is David Ogden who had a fascinating as well as horrifying war-time career - having been held captive by the Iroquois - and now lies in the Croton Union Cemetery in Treadwell in the town of Franklin.

However, another veteran lies alone in a field where he expired. He died not in battle or from old battle wounds, not from illness stemming from his service to his country, but from being struck by a tree he had been in the process of felling. This unusual burial site came about because his companion made the decision to bury this man on the site of his sudden death.

Thomas Gillett (also spelled Gillet), who rests forever in the Town of Meredith, lived in the town of Delhi on Elk Creek Road in a log cabin owned by William Fisher. The cabin measured a mere 24' by 13'. This small abode housed Thomas, his wife Hannah, and their seven children. The cabin stood where the current Clark farm is located. The Gilletts settled there about 1796, but there is speculation that Thomas might have had a cabin on the land in Meredith near the site of his burial. Nobody knows for sure.

Thomas was born on January 31, 1748 in Wintbury, Connecticut to Sergeant Jonah Gillett and his wife, Elizabeth Granger Gillett. Interestingly, Thomas was the third Thomas born to Jonah and Elizabeth, the first two having died very young. The youngest child in the family, Thomas joined nine living siblings: brothers Jonah, Jr., Simeon, and Joel and sisters Elizabeth, Margery, Rachel, Tryphena, Mercy, and Lucy.

At the start of the war in 1775, Thomas was serving in Huntington's 8th Regiment, in Captain Humphrey's 4th Company. He served in that regiment from July 7 to December 18, 1775. His friend, Solomon Ranney (more on him later), served at the same time in the 7th Regiment. His brother, Jonah Gillett, Jr., was a drummer with the 4th Company with two more Gilletts serving in the same company: Zacheus Gillett, also a drummer and Stephen Gillett.

In June of 1776, Thomas is rec-

orded as being a trumpeter in the Regiment of Militia Light Horse in Major Skinner's troop. Five hundred in this troop marched on July 8, 1776 to New York, but a dispute as to whether horsemen could be called upon to do infantry guard work as desired by General George Washington saw this command dismissed and returned home. Later on in the same season, many of the Light Horse returned to the Army and were personally thanked by General Washington for their services.

In 1776, while back home in Connecticut, Thomas married Hannah, enlisting later that year to serve in Major Sheldon's Regiment Light Horse. From October 23 to December 4, 1776, Thomas served again in Major Skinner's troop, accompanying Washington on his retreat through New Jersey. Another Gillett, his cousin Abel, was also in Skinner's Troop.

Gillett again answered the call to serve his country when Washington urged the Governor of New York to send militia "and experienced men" to serve for six weeks at Peekskill. During this enlistment which lasted from March 26 to May 5, 1777 Thomas served in Brigadier General Erastus Wolcott's Brigade, with Captain Abel Pettibone's Company.

Very little is known of Thomas' life following his service in the Revolutionary War, but we do know that he came to Delaware County, NY and we do know that he was acquainted with another Revolutionary War veteran who lived nearby - Solomon Ranney.

Solomon lived up Scotch Hill in the town of Meredith. On December 20, 1805, Thomas, aged 57, was with Ranney in a field on the latter's farm. While felling a tree, Thomas was killed when the tree fell on him. At the time, there were no established cemeteries nearby and the effort of bringing Thomas' body back to the Elk Creek cabin of his new widow seemed daunting. Therefore, Solomon buried the body of his fallen friend right there in the field, at the site of the fatal accident. Presumably, it was he who etched Thomas's initials and the year of death on a fieldstone he set at the gravesite (see photo).

Fast forward two centuries, when the descendants of both Solomon Ranney and Thomas Gillett, along with local historians, came together in an unusual but touching effort. After much research on Thomas' war history, former Town of Meredith Historian, Bernice Te-



Fieldstone set at gravesite.

 Excerpts From Julia Griffin's Diary ~ Stamford, NY ~ 1852 - 53

From the Griffin Collection in the Stamford Village Library ~ Transcribed by Karen Cuccinello

Julia Griffin (1838 – 1854) was the daughter of Charles and Adaline Griffin of Stamford. Charles was listed as a merchant in the 1850 census. Later, he also wrote the *History of Stamford*.

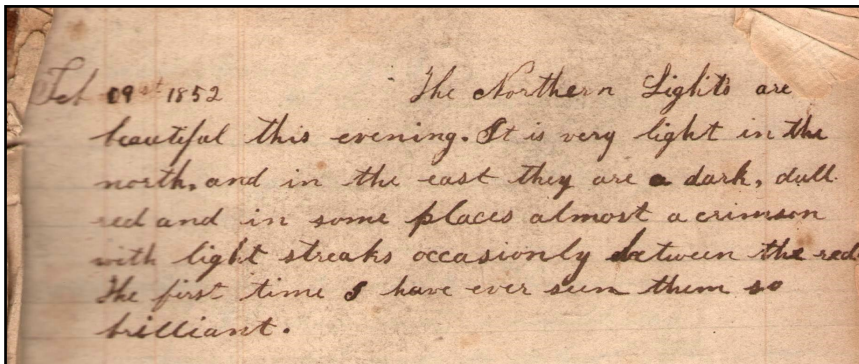
Julia was 14 – 15 years old when she wrote these entries. Tragically, she died soon after on February 16, 1854. Her brother John recorded in his own diary that she had been sick on Feb 10th and was buried on February 19th, 1854.

Note: Original spelling and grammar retained.

1852

Thur. Feb 9, 1852

The Northern Lights are beautiful this evening. It is very light in the north and in the east they are a dark dull red and in some places almost a crimson with light streaks occasionally between the red. The first time I have ever seen them so brilliant.



Sat. Feb 21, 1852

I have been to visit Adelaide Newel today and called to see Nancy Dayton. I played on her new piano. Adelaide made me a present of a picture which she painted. Returned home just before dark. The first time I have been there.

Mon. Feb 23, 1852

Today Antha and Jane Reel has been here. Jane and I have been to the Academy this afternoon to visit the school. The first time I have been there since I left school in Autumn to take music lessons.

Fri. Feb 27, 1852

Miss Elizabeth Stevens has been here today to give me a lesson in music. Ma has gone to visit Mrs. Whitford.

1853

Wed. Jan 26, 1853

It has been very cold today. Sarah Churchill is going to stay with me tonight, it is so stormy she cannot go home.

Thur. Jan 27, 1853

It has been a very cold day. Sarah and I went to school this morning and thought we should freeze before we could get there. This afternoon I finished painting my moss Rose. I have received a letter from Julia Ann. I am very glad to hear from her. She sent me a sugar heart.

Fri. Jan 28, 1853

School is out for this week and I am very glad. I have written my composition since I came from school. Adalaide Newel and Harriet has called on me. A.N. played a piece on the piano it was very pretty.

Sat. Jan 29, 1853

This forenoon I drew a bunch of tulips all ready for painting. This afternoon Miss LaMont, Ann and I went down to Mr. Churchills and did not get back until 11 Oclock at night.

Sun. Jan 30, 1853

This forenoon I went to meeting. Mr. Philips preached. This evening I went to meeting and heard Mr. Gibson preach, we had a very good sermon.

Mon. Jan 31, 1853

I have been to school and was head in my spelling class, it has been very lonesome otherwise but few scholars.

Tues. Feb 1, 1853

I have been to school today. Sarah was not there this afternoon.

Wed. Feb 2, 1853

This evening I have attended a donation at Mr. Gibsons. Mr. LaMont and Miss LaMont, Angeline and I rode down with doctor Stanley. They was just ready to go to tea when we got there. There was a good many there and we had a very nice time. Got home at quarter of 10. We rode back with Mr. Thorp. The snow is almost gone. It is ?? ground down the hill.

Sat. Feb 12, 1853

This evening Mr and Miss LaMont Ann and myself have spent the evening at Mr Newells. When we got there we found Calvin and Sarah there. Adalaide played on her piano and we had a very nice time. Returned home at 11oclock. We had a very pleasant walk.

Mon. Feb 14, 1853

It is very stormy out today so bad I cannot go to school so I have drawn a bunch of roses ready to paint.

Thur. March 3, 1853

It has been a very stormy day. I finished my roses today. They look very pretty. Ann Griffin came up this afternoon to make a visit.

Fri. March 4, 1853

It has been a very pleasant day. George and his wife and little girl and Antha came up this forenoon. Ann Griffin and Antha Reel came up to visit the school. Miss LaMont went up with Jane Champlin after school. Miss Teal came home with me to paint, she staid till dark.

Sat. March 5, 1853

It snows quite hard this morning and the snow is quite deep. Miss LaMont started for home this forenoon. I have studied all day to get my lessons for Monday. Ann Griffin went home in the stage this afternoon.

Sun. March 6, 1853

It has been a very pleasant day. Antha, Ann and I went to meeting this afternoon and when we got home we found Stephen Hays at our house. Antha went home with C. Shaw.

Mon. March 7, 1853

It has been a very pleasant day. It has been very lonesome at school today. Stephen started for home this morning (by) foot and alone.

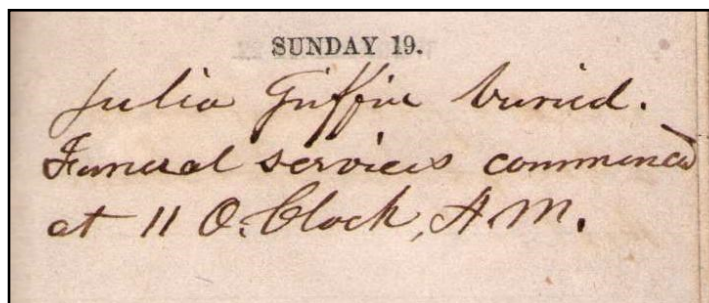
Fri. March 11, 1853

I have been to school today and it was so stormy I did not come home for my dinner. Antha went home after I came from school. It snowed and blowed very hard when she went.

Sat. March 12, 1853

This morning the snow was very deep. Before noon it cleared off very pleasant. At one oclock Don Gilbert and Jane Champlin came over in a sleigh for John and me to take a sleigh ride. He drove up to Mr.

Newells for Robert and then down to Mr. Churchills for Stephen and Sarah and then we went down to visit Francis school. When school was out we brought Francis back with us. We had a good ride and got home at 8 oclock. The snow is all gone, it rains and is very mushy.



John Griffin diary entry February 19, 1854

The Stamford Library history room is open anytime the library is open: M, 12 – 5pm, T & TH, 12 – 6pm. W & F, 10am -5pm and Sat., 11am – 2pm. If anyone would like help researching please email Karen Cuccinello at karenc@midtel.net to set up an appointment or call the library 607-652-5001.

A cat belonging to William Austin, Trout Creek, gave birth to a litter of six kittens, all of which were joined together. – *Reporter*

One hundred and seventy-three packages of butter were shipped by the Ulster & Delaware Railroad from Roxbury last week Monday.

The old carding mill, built by Col. John Townsend in Walton sixty years ago, and for the last twenty-one years run by John Videtto, has been closed up.

Hobart Independent ~ May 24, 1888



Hamden Bicentennial ~ Celebrating 200 Years ~ 1825 – 2025

The town of Hamden was founded April 4, 1825 by an act of the state legislature. It was formed from the towns of Delhi and Walton.

To celebrate this milestone, the town will host a variety of events **July 12 and 13.**

There will be a parade at 11am on Saturday, July 12 and a 5K

Covered Bridge run at 9am on Sunday, July 13. There will be historical displays set up at the museum and the town hall Saturday. Both days will be filled with vintage baseball games.

For more information check out their website at:

<https://www.hamden1825.org/>



A New Chapter for Purple Mountain Press Publisher of Regional NYS History Books

By Rebecca Barry

No doubt many Delaware County Historical Association members know about the storied independent publisher Purple Mountain Press (PMP), founded in Fleischmanns in 1973. The press has issued more than a hundred books on New York State history and culture, with particular attention to the Catskills, including Tim Duerden's *A History of Delaware County, New York: A Catskill Land and Its People, 1797-2007*. So many remarkable local authors, such as Robert and Johanna Titus, Michael Kudish, Dorothy Kubik, Bill Birns, Tim Duerden, Shirley Dunn, Diane Galusha, Ray LaFever, and Bob Steuding have been affiliated with the publishing house over the years.

As of this past January, PMP has changed hands. The new owners, Brett Barry, Rebecca Barry, Carolyn Bennett, and Lee Hudson, intend to bring new energy and ideas to the press, while honoring its historic role in the

region. In the early stages, the team plans to assess the impressive backlist of titles to evaluate books for reprint, new and updated editions, or formats. They're also reconnecting with readers, booksellers, museums, historical societies, and libraries. Further down the line, perhaps by autumn of this year, PMP will begin accepting submissions for new manuscripts, with a goal to issue 2-4 books per year.

"Purple Mountain Press has illuminated many corners of New York State history," said Lee Hudson. "It's a privilege to continue its tradition."



The Purple Mountain Press team at work. From left to right: Lee Hudson, Rebecca Barry, Brett Barry, and Carolyn Bennett.

To stay informed about PMP's new books and events, readers can visit nysbooks.com to sign up for a newsletter, and can follow on Instagram and Facebook. PMP is also offering DCHA members free shipping with the code DCHA now through June 30, 2025.



We're Seeking New Board Members!

The Delaware County Historical Association is looking for new board members to help us continue our mission to preserve and present the history of our county.

In hopes of extending DCHA's representation across the county we are specifically looking for people from the towns of Hancock, Deposit, Middletown, Stamford and Harpersfield. Although, you won't be turned away because of your place of residence!

Board members must be members of DCHA, or become one, and maintain membership throughout their term. Individual membership is \$20. Regular board meetings are here at DCHA in Delhi and usually meet once a month on Friday mornings – although board members are not expected to attend every meeting!

If you are interested, or have a suggestion of someone you think might be good for DCHA's board, please contact us by phone or email.

April

Fall softly, gentle April rain,
The summer flowers will bloom again;
They feel thy freshening caress,
And blossom into loveliness.

Shine brightly, glowing April sun,
The winter's past, the spring begun;
We hear light footsteps in the grass,
Where fairies linger as they pass.

The mountains glisten through a mist
Of azure blue and amethyst,
And sunset clouds of red and gold
Around their summits lightly fold.

While birds amid the twilight dim
Will sweetly chirp their evening hymn,
And build their nests and make their home,
And gladly tell us, "Spring has come."

Stamford Mirror ~ April 27, 1880

Excerpts from *The Grange Cook Book* — 1940s

Tried Recipes Gathered and Arranged by the Service and Hospitality Committee of
Pepacton Grange, No. 1407. Committee: Mrs. Tracy Neish, Mrs. Perry Champlin, Mrs. Volney Keator

Pepacton Grange No. 1407 was organized November 20, 1916, by Brother George E. Ballard, Deputy of Delaware County at the time. It had twenty-six charter members. This was a flourishing grange for several years, then interest failed and it became nearly dormant for four or five years. In 1935 through the efforts of Deputy Cleveland and Brother H. G. Shaver, grange spirit was again revived and Pepacton Grange is now one of the leading granges in the county with a present membership of 133.

From the Official Directory and History of Delaware County Granges, Patrons of Husbandry, 1939.

MOCK CHICKEN PIE

Two cups thin white sauce, 2 cans chicken soup (concentrated), 2 cans tuna fish, biscuit dough. Combine white sauce and chicken soup and heat thoroughly. Remove from stove and add tuna fish in small pieces (not shredded). Put into casserole, cover top with rounds of biscuit dough, and bake until biscuits are done. Left over chicken and gravy may be substituted for the chicken soup if seasoned with celery salt or other seasonings. — *Edith Miller*, Mundale Grange, No. 1539.

NOODLEBURG

One pound round steak (ground), 2 tablespoons shortening, 2 cups noodles (cooked), 2 ½ cups canned tomatoes, 2 cups chopped green pepper, 2 tablespoons chopped onion, salt and pepper. Brown the steak in melted shortening, add the onion, green pepper, salt, pepper, noodles and tomatoes. Mix all the ingredients well. Cook 1 hour. — *Mrs. Homer A. Benedict*, South Kortright Grange, No. 1363.

MEAT ROLY-ROLY

Two cups sweet milk, 6 tablespoons melted butter, 4 teaspoons baking powder, 4 cups flour, salt. Roll to about ½ inch thickness. Grind meat, season and moisten. Spread on dough about 1 inch thick. Roll up like roll jell cake and bake in quite a hot oven. Serve hot with gravy. Fresh meat scraps or canned meats are good. — *Mrs. Alfred Currie*, Hamden Grange, No. 1477.

ONE DISH MEAL

Two cups raw potatoes, 2 cups celery, 2 cups raw steak or beef, 1 cup raw onion, 1 cup green peppers, 2 cups canned tomatoes, 2 teaspoons salt, ¼ teaspoon pepper. Cut the vegetables in small chunks or cubes. Place in the order given and put in a well-greased baking dish. Bake in oven 250° for 2 hours. This makes a very nice meal on a cold night. — *Mrs. Carl Schulz*, Davenport Grange, No. 1516.

MEAT AND NUT SANDWICHES

Chop fine any cold meat. Use any nuts and grind. Mix salt, pepper, tomato catsup and enough melted butter to spread. — *Mrs. Ralph Reynolds Jr.*, Pepacton Grange, No. 1407.

TANGO SALAD

Put a ball of cream or Roquefort cheese in the center of halved pears. Sprinkle with nuts. Serve on lettuce with highly seasoned dressing. — *Mrs. Tracy Neish*, Pepacton Grange, No. 1407.

GOLDEN GLOW SALAD

Two cups boiling water, 1 package lemon jello, 3 medium-sized carrots (grated), 1 cup crushed pineapple (drained), 1/8 teaspoon salt. — *Mrs. W.E. Griffin*, Wawaka Grange, No. 1486.

CRUMPETS

One quart milk, 1 ½ quarts flour, 2 or 3 eggs, 1 teaspoon salt, 2 teaspoons sugar, 4 teaspoons baking powder. Mix into a stiff batter and bake in well-greased muffin rings or a hot griddle. — *Harry Wright*, Pepacton Grange, No. 1407.

CHERRY MUFFINS

Two cups flour, ½ teaspoon salt, 2 ½ teaspoons baking powder, ½ cup sugar, 1 egg, 1 cup milk, ¼ cup melted shortening, ¾ cup cherries. Sift dry ingredients, put in egg and milk, then add fat and the cherries. Bake in muffin tins in a moderate oven 20 minutes. — *Mrs. Loren Lyons*, Utsayantha Grange, No. 1313.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT CAKE

Two tablespoons shortening, 1 ¼ cups sugar. Cream together. Add 1 can tomato soup in which 1 teaspoon soda has been dissolved, 2 eggs, 2 cups flour, 1 teaspoon cocoa, 2 teaspoons cinnamon, 3 teaspoons baking powder. — *Mrs. Frank Dibble*, Shavertown Grange, No. 1490.



Exploring DCHA's Collections: The Folk Art of Homer Benedict

Living to the ripe old age of 106, Homer Benedict (1900—2006) of South Kortright was the oldest living folk artist in Delaware County. In 1996 DCHA staff Folklorist Ellen Damasky interviewed Homer and created an exhibit of his work here. Homer gifted most of the pieces on display at that time to us. Since then a few more items have been gifted, making a grand total of 29 pieces made by Homer Benedict in DCHA's collections. The following are excerpts from the 1996 exhibit guide, "The Folk Art of Homer Benedict," by Ellen Damasky:



Homer Benedict, 1996
Photo by J. Jackson

Art, or the various forms of expression that artists engage in, is one of the many ways that ideas travel across cultural boundaries. One of the most heated discussions about the nature of art focuses on the alleged differences between "folk" art and "fine" art. In this discussion, ideas and philosophies about art become the center of controversy, the message presented by the work itself is often lost or misunderstood. Yet, the labor and creativity that drives folk artists is as real as that of the fine artist. Folk art, like fine art, is more than an imitation or reflection of life. It is life.

When you walk into Homer Benedict's living room, (pictured below) you are overtaken by a feeling of motion. Seemingly hundreds of wooden figures – horses, carts, people – appear to be moving as



Photo by J. Jackson

one large force across the floor. The longer you stay among these figures, the more intimately you come to know them. And the more you come to know them, the more real the possibility becomes that these figures do indeed move of their own accord.

To say that Homer Benedict lives with his work is perhaps

an understatement. His "junk," as he calls it, takes up a significant portion of his living room, fills up the dining room, and has found its way into the kitchen. Homer's collection, composed of farm implements, machinery, people and architecture, brings back to life the bygone days of farming. An exhibit of a small wagon and horses ("much better work than I do") that he saw at the Delaware County Fair in Walton in the 1980s gave him the idea to begin what has become an extensive body of work. Beginning in 1988 with a painted lumber wagon, Homer's collection has developed to the degree that his work tells its own story – the story of life on a farm – where nothing exists on its own, but is part of a larger, integrated system.

The first horse that Homer made was patterned after a metal horse held up to the light. Although they are all made from patterns, each horse (and each wooden human figure) is uniquely shaped, positioned, and highly individualized. No two faces are alike; the activity and motion of each piece is specifically designed for a particular task, complementing the various types of wagons Homer had made. Farming is not arbitrary, haphazard work. Carefully designed and executed, Homer Benedict's work pays homage to the smallest details of farming.

The exhibit Homer saw at the Delaware County fair rekindled his memory of a way of life that no longer exists. "Most everything is from what I remember," Homer states, adding that he thinks about particular people when he models a figure. Homer mentions often that his father pitched hay well into his seventies, and that he himself once shod thirteen horses in one day.

Homer's work deals with the specific roles of machinery, man, and labor. The wagons are constructed so they can easily be taken apart and examined: *When I start making a wagon the first thing I do is make the frame. And then I make the wheels, then the body, and then I make a pair of horses to go with the wagon. I cut the horses out on just a common saw table which I made myself. Then I use wood files and small sanders to finish them up. I use small nails and glue to hold the wagons together. The wheels are fastened on with a nail through the hub. Everything is loose and moveable and can be taken apart.*

Scrupulous attention is given to the construction of each and every piece. For instance, the knees of the man riding the hay cart are bendable, held together by pins. His hat is made out of cardboard, the hat band drawn around it etched in marker. The reins and harness held by the wagon driver are made out of bicycle tubing.



Hay Wagon. Photo by J. Jackson

To procure the materials he needs, Homer relies on long-established relationships with neighbors, local lumber shops, and junkyards. Before he took up carving, Homer collected, built, and rebuilt chairs, as well as other furniture. In the many

years since Homer has been actively retired, he has repaired and rebuilt countless chairs, many of which are fashioned together from parts of several chairs or other usable pieces of wood.

Homer's work embodies a way of life that is expressed through his art. As a communal endeavor, the recreation of life on the farm is kept going by contributions of wood and other materials from the South Kortright community where he resides. Not only do Homer's friends and neighbors contribute to his work by providing necessary materials, but often by making suggestions or requests for pieces that they would like to see. "Someone will make a remark or something and then I'll go and make it, like a hand rake or a scythe." Some pieces in Homer's collection are just for fun, like the tree limb reindeer and wooden notepads. The bird feeders are built to be used by the many birds that perch on his window sills, and the lanterns are used during storms when the wind's force proves stronger than the power lines made by man.

"The things that I've made are mostly what I've done as a youngster," Homer states, speaking specifically about the twenty-one years he spent living on a 240-acre farm in Treadwell. Homer's parents bought the farm in 1905, which at the time boasted numerous cows, horses, and various pieces of farm machinery. Today only the house is left; the acreage has been sold and left uncultivated for many years.

Although he insists that this work "isn't perfect," Homer believes that young people today are interested to know what life on the farms used to be like. Homer's carvings bring back to life the tradition of work that either no longer exists, or have changed significantly since his youth. Some things never change, however: "Lots of work to get done on a farm," Homer concedes. And although it's been some time since he got up at 5:30 to milk the cows, the same perseverance comes through when he says "if I think of doing something, I just go on and do it."

Forty-five Years in the Mercantile Business in Delhi, in the same Store.

From *Delaware Republican* ~ March 11, 1893

Mr. John W. Woodruff, of the firm of J. W. & C.S. Woodruff, is the senior member engaged in the mercantile business in this village. He came to Delhi March 1st, 1848, as a clerk in the store of John Blanchard, who was then engaged in business where the Woodruff store now is. In March, 1849, he became a partner of Mr. Blanchard, and has been engaged in business there ever since. On Wednesday evening the 45th annual inventory was completed, at each of which he has assisted in taking. Is there another merchant in Delaware County that can say the same?

Mr. Woodruff is now in the 68th year of his age, May he be spared to assist in taking many an annual inventory in the same store, and on each Sabbath be seen in his accustomed place in the church in which he has long been a communicant. — *Extract from P. in Gazette.*



Delhi Band in front of Woodruff Store, Main St. Delhi.
DCHA Archives.

WEST MEREDITH, April 8th 1880.

Friend Champ: — I notice in the MIRROR of April 6th, in the items from Roxbury, an account of a large hen's egg, with the request if anyone has a larger one to trot it out, which I propose to do. John H. Strong, of West Meredith, has a hen's egg which measures eight inches and three quarters one way and six inches and seven-eighths the other. It weighs five ounces quick weight. If anyone doubts the above, they can see the egg for themselves by calling at the house of John Strong.

Yours respectfully,
E.A. STRONG, P.M.

Stamford Mirror ~ April 13, 1880



Bronze veteran marker at Thomas' burial site

lian, secured an official bronze veteran marker to be placed alongside the homemade fieldstone marker. She also arranged to have a chain link fence erected to protect and mark the gravesite.

Not only that, all those interested put together an impressive ceremony that honored the lives of both

veterans in two locations, first Solomon's gravesite in the Bloomville Cemetery, followed by one in the field where Thomas rests. On August 5, 2004, many gathered to officially recognize the placing of the bronze veteran marker at Thomas' burial site. Music, speeches and the reading of poetry enhanced the ceremony nearly two hundred years after the untimely death of a man who survived years of service to his country, only to have his life cut tragically short.

Note: The field where Thomas Gillett lies is privately owned. However, permission has been known to be granted for respectful visitation to the site, accompanied by a descendant of the family who once owned the property and who also descends from the Ranney family.

Thieves recently entered a store at Cannonsville, and after breaking the iron drills on a large safe, they went to the post office and stole five dollars in postage stamps.

Stamford Mirror ~ March 2, 1880



History Corner

“Artillery from Acid: Delaware County’s Acid Factories and the First World War”

by Samantha Misa

Beginning in the 1880s, dozens of small hamlets known as “acid towns” were created throughout Delaware County. These towns were where “acid factories” utilized hardwood trees to produce acidic solvents and chemicals such as paint thinners, charcoal for fuel, and a naturally-occurring charcoal derivative known as acetone. Collectively, these products were known as wood chemicals.

Prior to 1914, when World War I commenced in Europe, production levels in the local wood chemical industry were decreasing. But the sudden wartime demand for acetone – once a type of solvent and now necessary as a propellant in artillery shells – kicked off a renewed period of prosperity and enormous output from factories in the region.

Artillery shells powered by acetone-based propellant manufactured in Delaware County were indispensable weapons during the First World War. Artillery bombshells contained high explosives that allowed detonation, but the acetone propellant was a form of explosive that fired the shell out of the gun. Since the 1890s, militaries had relied on organic acetone as the main source of propellant – not only for its explosive qualities, but also because, unlike black powder, it did not produce thick, dark smoke that impeded soldiers’ vision. Due to this quality, acetone-based propellant was referred to as “smokeless powder.”

Artillery shells were one of the most vital and destructive weapons of the Great War, and many historians estimate that artillery fire on Europe’s Western Front was responsible for around 60 percent of all battlefield casualties. This method of modern warfare ultimately forced infantry troops to adopt the era’s iconic attritional trench-style combat, as a necessary measure for protection against shell explosions and shrapnel. Historians estimate that the United States and Europe fired anywhere from 900 million to 1.2 billion artillery shells during the course of the war.

The acid factories of Delaware County were vital to providing much of the necessary acetone for propellant in these shells, and wartime demand would pull the industry out of the “slump” it had entered at the turn of the century. Despite the steady domestic industrial demand for acetone and other wood chemical products, the market for solvents became oversaturated in the 1910s. In January 1914, the Luzerne Chemical Company in Colchester shuttered an acid factory that employed twenty-five people due to an “overproduction” of chemicals. Other factories reported laying off dozens of workers in order to slow down production, and the price of a carload of acetone dropped from \$2.60 to \$1.60 “overnight.”

With factories across the Western Catskills reporting train cars full of acetone on hand, employment prospects did not improve until the outbreak of

the First World War in July 1914. As early as October 1914, local newspapers reported that two acid factories in Delaware County had reopened to help meet the demands of the “European war.” The factories swiftly transitioned from being “at a standstill” to functioning at maximum capacity. And factory owners predicted that European demand for acetone, “the most valuable derivative” of chemical production, would continue to increase as reports trickled in of diminished supplies abroad.

The numerous factories of Delaware County were quick to meet the burgeoning demand. Although records of the exact amount of acetone produced between 1914 and 1918 are lost, Catskill forest historian Frank Daniel Myers III estimated that the region produced 38,000,000 pounds during the course of the war. Myers based his estimation on the approximate number of wood cords consumed by each factory per year; one cord of wood produced around 200 pounds of acetone for smokeless powder.

Further records remain difficult to uncover, as almost all of the acid factories in Delaware and Sullivan counties sold their raw material to an agency in New York City, the William S. Gray Company, which then doled out the acetone to munitions factories such as DuPont. Unfortunately, records for the William S. Gray Company are irregular, as the company faced legal hurdles in 1925 due to poor record keeping and suspicion of tax evasion, and, like the acid factories themselves, left behind little in the way of documentation.

However, using records regarding the total amount of smokeless powder produced in the United States during the war – 273 million pounds – calculations suggest that Delaware and Sullivan counties supplied around 14 percent of the required acetone for the war.

Some local factories, however, did keep reasonable documentation, particularly as demand for acetone grew. The existing records for the Corbett & Stuart Acid Factory in the town of Colchester — touted as the “largest producer” during the war — reveal that the company’s output of acetone increased dramatically from 62,400 pounds annually pre-war to 2,693,264 pounds in 1918. The factory was even

compelled to begin operating twenty-four hours a day to keep up with demand.

To entice the necessary labor, wages in acid factories during the war jumped from \$1.60 per day to \$3 or \$3.50 per day. In January 1916, the chemical company Merritt & Gladstone began the construction of a factory in Shavertown, Delaware County, which became operational only seven months later, evidencing the high demand for acetone and the rapid ability of the region to meet it.

Nevertheless, despite increased production, longer hours, better wages for employees, and even new factories, demand for acetone consistently outstripped supply. The shortfall of materiel made it readily apparent to European scientists that a more efficient

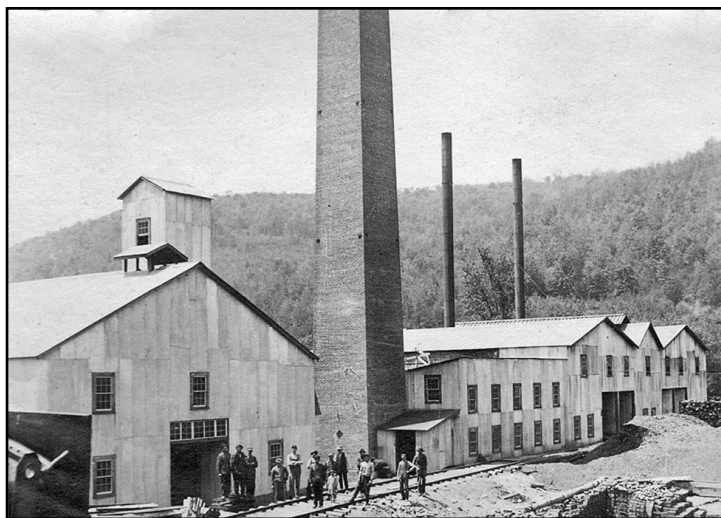
way of producing acetone was necessary — one that involved less wood, a material that required a year of drying before it could be used in the acid factories.

During the war, French, British, and German manufacturers attempted to utilize various substitutes for acetone, but found the alternative versions lacking. However, in 1915, British chemist Chaim Weizmann discovered a new process of making

acetone, one that involved the distillation of maize and starch products through bacterial fermentation. British manufacturers quickly adopted the “Weizmann process” for quicker, more efficient acetone production.

In the latter years of the war and in the years following, European and American munitions factories adopted the cheaper, easier Weizmann process. DuPont, flush with wartime profits, invested in adopting the process to create its own acetone products, while also funding academic chemical research into improving Weizmann’s original method.

The end of the war in November 1918, the subsequent drop in demand for acetone, and the development of substitutes due to wartime pressure, signaled the “death knell” for the acid industry in the Catskills. Factories in Delaware and Sullivan counties “simply could not compete” with the cheaper, chemically-synthesized acetone, and by the 1930s, many of the factories that had helped the United States and its allies win the war were forced to close their doors and lay off their workers.



Corbett and Stuart acid factory, circa 1915.
Image courtesy of the Colchester Historical Society.

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Headwaters of History

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Editor: Tim Duerden

Designer: Angela Gaffney

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