

Greene County Gleanings

by Raymond Beecher

Families have been known to save certain types of personal letters for a variety of reasons. Over the decades a number of these have found their way into special historical collections. This past week Miss Shirley M. Overbagh, Catskill, presented the Vedder Memorial Library with two Greene County letters, decades apart in age. The first is written by Priscilla Weeks of Cairo on Aug. 20, 1835; the other is a Spanish-American War letter from the pen of Willis Dean Overbaugh of Catskill. Following the custom of the time, Priscilla Weeks folded her letter in lieu of using any envelope and sealing same with wax. The military one is a blaze of patriotic red, white and blue colors, with a lithograph design of the American flag and a vignette of the battleship Maine and the "Remember" slogan.

Of special local history interest is the 1895 letter's mention of the "lively" camp religious meetings at Cauterskill. Among the acquaintances mentioned in her letter to Miss Angeline Pine are Polly Stevens of Greenville, Messrs. Green and Moriarity, as well as the Reverends Selleck and Lyons. The

recipient was then teaching in a one-room schoolhouse at Cauterskill and received the letter "To the care of Mr. John Hicks, Catskill."

The Spanish-American War letter from Camp McKinley at Honolulu comments on the climate in those islands, the types of uniforms issued, recreation, the performance of their military band, and the sailing of the Australia. An element of homesickness surfaces as he writes: "It seems like we left about five years ago instead of five months." In commenting about the very high price of butter and eggs he wrote: "Eggs are selling at 50 cents the dozen and butter at 90 cents the pound. If only you had your little flock of [Catskill] chickens here you would make some money with their eggs at that price."

Willis Overbaugh also comments on the news reaching the islands of the big naval parade in New York harbor and up the Hudson. His envelope contains the two-cent commemorative stamp "Farming in the West." Under date of Sept. 10, 1898 Overbaugh was enrolled in Company "M" 1st Infantry, New York Volunteers.