

Greene County Gleanings

by Raymond Beecher

Reaching its 200th birthday in a remarkable state of preservation, one of Greene County's historic properties will be open to the public on Sunday afternoon, Sept. 19. The contribution of \$5 from each attendee will enhance the capital construction fund of Greenville Memorial Library. Dr. and Mrs. James A. Rowan are to be commended for their support of that worthwhile project.

The Prevost Manor House at West Greenville has, since its construction by Fitch Lamphere, been known as "Hush Hush" or the Prevost Manor House. Augustine Prevost often referred to it as the "home farm" after the English system of large rural English landholdings. Since the later years of George V. Vanderbilt's residency, the site has been on the National Register of Historic Properties.

Life was not without problems for its builder and first occupant, Major Augustine Prevost. Of the millions of acres of unsettled land claimed by his father General Prevost, his father-in-law George Croghan, his uncles and himself, all that survived the British defeat in the Revolutionary conflict was the Prevost patent in Greene County. Even that was a close call, Aaron Burr being credited with using his political connections to prevent confiscation. For a time during the war Abraham Lott, the NYS banker, had his eye on this unsettled land of several thousand acres, even going so far as to providing the name Lottsania for its proposed settlement.

At the time of his second marriage, this one to Anna Bogardus of

Catskill in 1792, Major Augustine Prevost was "land poor." Some of the money needed to build "Hush Hush" came from his willingness to settle land titles with the Connecticut squatters on his patent.

At "Hush Hush" Anna and Augustine reared 12 children, the 13th having died at the time of birth. Here also Theodosia, their granddaughter, grew up after the death of both of her parents in 1826. The second and third generation of Prevosts would reside here through the remainder of the 19th century, attempting to support themselves by means of agricultural pursuits.

To Augustine Prevost's credit, he was a "hands on" farmer, if also a "gentleman farmer." This interest and effort is revealed in his journal entries. By 1814 the Prevost landholdings had been reduced to 990 acres: "Weaver's field, Hill field, school house field, little orchard, house lotts, wash house field, west meadow, east meadow, Rouer's farm, mill farm, etc." Under the heading of Homestead, he would list: "1 dwelling house 1 story & 1/2, 1 small wash house, 1 bathing house in a thumbling state, 2 barns--one very old, wood house, small farm house, hog pen," all part of the home farm of house and out-buildings. Under a separate category would be listed: "one grist mill with two pr stones, three small buildings and one barn, 1 saw mill, and 1 bad barn, rather a Hovel."

In addition to viewing the Prevost Manor House and furnishings on Sunday afternoon, visitors will have the unusual opportunity to scan a rare collection of manuscript material relating to the Prevosts of Greenville. These rarities will include the contract for the construction of the homestead, as well as an assortment of paper

items on the afternoon's loan from the Greene County Historical Society's Vedder Memorial Library holdings. Included in the latter will be Augustine Prevost's journal for the years 1813-1814, a second record book detailing expenses at the saw and the grist mills, as well as one of the original deeds of 1792 between purchaser Samuel Benjamin Spees and seller Augustine Prevost. Evidence of the longstanding boundary line dispute settlement between the Coeymans-Blaisdell heirs and Augustine Prevost will be on display in the form of the important Gore map.

Some of the journal entries are not without a degree of humor as the one for August 7, 1814 when Augustine Prevost would write: "Sunday, through necessity from the state of the weather, my wheat being down and not raked up — hands this afternoon in the field finished raking, binding both my and wheat and taken to the Barn by extraordinary exertions & whiskey [for hands Perrew, Sam, Hank & Thomas]. Nothing now out but my oats & a little hay — both Barns Stock full."

Other Prevost manuscripts will include blacksmith bills, the Union College tuition one for son William, the Bartow-Prevost partnership settlement, as well as other papers from the 1790s into the early 1800s. Also on Sunday afternoon display will be the original minute book of the first Greenville Academy, constructed on land set aside for community needs by the patentee.

Seldom does such an unusual opportunity present itself to the public. Attendance will support a very worthwhile community effort and at the same time enhance one's knowledge of a segment of Local History.

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