

Greene County Gleanings

by Raymond Beecher

Of all the freight boats connected with the Hudson River and more especially with Greene County river ports, few could outshine the "Redfield" and the "McManus." For many years they operated as a team. Both met their end in spectacular blazes, some 9 years apart. The *Recorder* would supply details.

Of the two large propeller vessels, the "Redfield" was the better known and remembered. Constructed in East Albany yards in 1862 during the Civil War, for Commodore Alfred Van Santvoord and designed for fast freight and passenger service between Albany and New York, it was 182 feet in length, had a 33 foot beam and a 10 foot depth of hold. The one-stacked vessel was built for rapid loading and unloading with four large openings on each side, plus a small passenger saloon on the second deck. It carried the well known and respected name of William C. Red-

field, the developer of the so-called Safety Barge for timid steamboat passengers, a system in vogue on the Hudson between 1825 and the early 1830's. Mr. Redfield would later become superintendent of the Swiftsure Towing Line.

After five years with the Van Santvoord interests, title passed to new owners who operated the "Redfield" between Stuyvesant, Coxsackie and New York. Eventually, under the ownership of the Catskill Evening Line Company, the "Redfield" and the "McManus" could be seen for many years at the various river landings. While berthed in New York, on Aug. 27, 1910, the "Thomas McManus" burned at her pier, a total loss. The "Redfield" would outlast her by 9 years.

While under command of Captain Henry B. Briggs, after being unloaded at the Hudson railroad dock in June 1910, the "Redfield"

was moved to the Briggs & Son dock in Athens to await further shipping orders. (It did not carry a load of baled hay as rumor would later have it.) An exploding oil lamp in the hold near the boiler room was the culprit. The flames spread rapidly and could not be extinguished. Fearful of the loss by fire of Athens riverfront buildings, the ferryboat "Geo. H. Power" was impressed into service to tow the burning "Redfield" to the Middle Ground; there she burned to the water's edge. Crew member Lou Johnston was the hero of the hour, he being the last man aboard, having tossed the tow line to the ferryboat, then jumping into the river and swimming ashore. Like the "McManus," the "Redfield" was deemed a total loss, it being valued at \$25,000 and insured for \$15,000.

Of those river men who mourned her loss, their consolation was: "She died in harness."

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In an old tin box, somewhat the worse for age, was a miscellaneous assortment of paper material of local historical interest. The contribution to the Vedder Library comes from William A. and Albert F. Matter, Coxsackie.

Farmers Institutes held in various locations around the state were intended to assist agriculturists in their endeavor to earn a livelihood from the land. Hosted by a local committee consisting of George Van Schaack, Henry J. Miller, F.W. Cole, John H. Whitbeck, Albert W. Pierce, Edwin L. VanDenberg, Arthur Kniffen, and Irving Collier, one such Farmers Institute was held in the Reformed Church at West Coxsackie on Wednesday, Feb. 14, 1914. Presiding was John H. Barron, Nunda, Livingston County.

Among the topics to be covered

were: maintaining fertility (use of lime, organic matter and commercial fertilizers); farm management; swine: a profitable industry; improvement of the dairy herd; questions pertaining to horticulture; the farm woodlot; the message of scientific agriculture to the country church.

At 1:30 p.m. a Special Women's Session was scheduled for matters of homemaking interest. Speakers included among others, George L. Barrus, State Conservationist; and Dr. W.H. Dexter, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture. The local committee had also arranged a musical program between sessions. The ladies of the Reformed Church had a busy day serving both dinner at noon and supper. Special arrangements were made for the accommodation of participants' horses.

The printed programs, one o

which survived in the aforementioned tin box, were produced by the Bureau of Farmers Institute, Edward Van Alstyne, Director. F.W. Cole, Coxsackie, was the area correspondent for this agricultural group.

These informative sessions were not only used to provide information on progressive farming, but also served as a social contact opportunity, particularly for the rural population.

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