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THE CATSKILL MECHANICAL SOCIETY

—Raymond Beecher

Last year, while renovating an older house at 261 Jefferson Avenue, Catskill, the Albert Antonelli family made an unusual discovery. In a wall, behind old lath and plaster, lay a leather bound record book of early vintage. Apparently it had fallen down from attic storage in a bygone era. To the casual examiner, it was obvious this was a Minute Book of the Catskill Mechanical Society and covered the years 1824 into 1844. Pinckney's *Sketches of Catskill* contains some pertinent information about this early Catskill organization, but only enough to increase the interest of local historians. Recognizing the potential importance of the volume, Mr. and Mrs. Antonelli generously gave it to the Greene County Society's Vedder Memorial Library. That civic gesture led to the writing of this article.

The Author

Founded in Catskill on December 24, 1802, the Catskill Mechanical Society was only one of many such craftsmen's mutual benefit societies to organize both here and abroad during the first half of the nineteenth century. That December date was an occasion for its annual anniversary banquet in after years. Promoting the "dignity and well-being of mechanical labor" as distinct from such occupations as doctor, lawyer, minister, ship captain, storekeeper, etc., these craftsmen saw themselves as key components in the economic expansion of the country, as did their counterparts in England and Scotland. While the Industrial Revolution was in "full swing," it had not fully superseded the master craftsmen and their apprentices.

As established, the Catskill group had three major goals. These were (1) financial assistance to needy members and their families, (2) informal adult education, (3) the operation of a free apprentices lending library.

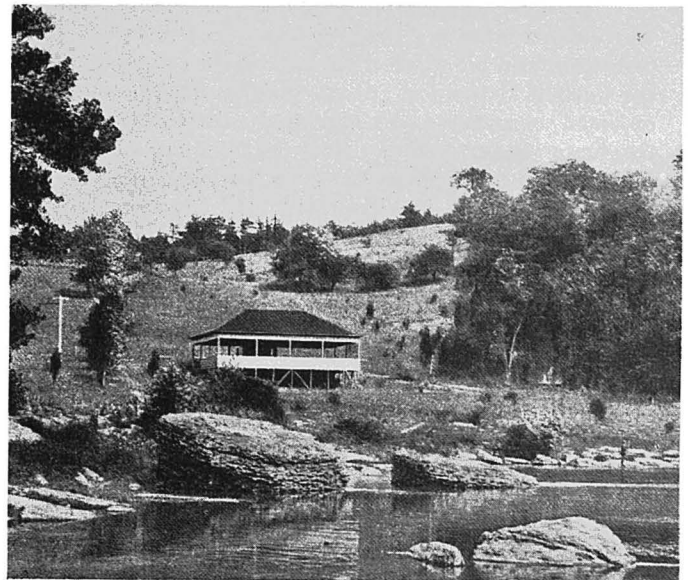
Within a few years after its founding, the Catskill Mechanical Society sought to incorporate. Approval came from the state in 1807, by action of the Assembly, the Senate, and the Council of Revision:

Whereas John Blanchard, Stephen Root, David Throp, Ephraim Baker, Nathaniel Hinman, Reuben Sanderson, Isaac Nichols, James Cole, Adonijah Baker, Henry Ashley, Benjamin Sole, Elisha Ferguson, John Hyde, Francis Botsford, Mackay Croswell, Lemuel Hall, Adonijah Sherman, Peter Breasted, John Doan, Richard Hill, Hiland Hill, John P. Bolen, Jehiel Preston, and Henry L'Homedieu, Mechanics of the Village of Catskill, in the County of Greene, have, by their petition to the

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LET THE TROLLEYS COME! (Part III)

—Raymond Beecher



Post card written by Lulu Maunton to her father, E. H. Maunton, Windsor Terrace, Brooklyn, N.Y. Card is labeled: View in Rip Van Winkle Park, Catskill, N. Y.

July 25, 1908

Dear Papa,

Lena and I have had a splendid afternoon. We went to Catskill. From there we took a trolley to Jefferson and to Leeds. We rode as far as the trolley goes, that is across the old bridge. We saw Austen's [Austin's] Glen. The picture shows just the view we saw. I could not miss that trip when I had the opportunity to go. Tomorrow, if it is clear, I expect to see the country around here.

With love,
Lulu



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MECHANICAL SOCIETY *(continued from page 11)*

Legislature, represented, that they are associated in a body, under the name of the Catskill Mechanical Society for the relief of their unfortunate and indigent members, their widows and children, and other charitable objects, pray to be incorporated into a body politic for the purpose of securing and confirming the funds of said Society to those benevolent purposes: And Whereas the views of the said petitioners appear to be laudable and worthy of legislative patronage and assistance — therefore,

Be it enacted by the people of the State of New York, represented in Senate & Assembly, that all such persons as now are or hereafter may become members of the Catskill Mechanical Society shall be and hereby are ordained, constituted and appointed a body politic and corporate, in fact and in name, by the name of "The Catskill Mechanical Society" and by that name, they and their successors, as a corporation, shall be vested with the same powers, privileges and made liable to the same restrictions as The Provident Society, The Mutual Benefit Society, The Benevolent Society, The Albion Benefit Society in the City of New York and The Social Society of the City of Schenectady — passed the sixteenth day of February, one thousand eight hundred and five.

And Be it further enacted, That the officers of the "Catskill Mechanical Society" shall consist of a President, vice President, Treasurer and Secretary, and a board of five directors, to be elected agreeably to the provisions of the Act aforesaid; and that John Blanchard shall be the first President, Richard Hill the first vice President, Henry Ashley the first Treasurer, Adonijah Sherman the first Secretary, and Stephen Root, Francis Botsford, Richard Hill, John Doan, and John P. Bolen the first board of directors of the said corporation, to hold their offices respectively until the third Wednesday of February next, after the passing of this Act, or until others shall be elected in their [stead].

State of New York. In Assembly Feb. 27, 1807
This Bill having been read the third time — resolved, that the Bill do pass. By order of the Assembly, /s/A. McCord, Speaker

State of New York. In Senate March 16, 1807
This Bill having been read the third time — resolved that the Bill do pass. By order of the Senate, /s/Jn^o Broome, President

In Council of Revision March 20, 1807 Resolved that it does not appear improper to the council, that this bill should become a law of this State. /s/Morgan Lewis [Governor]

From Pinckney and other sources, the names of members and their respective trades can be identified. In some, such as joiners and carpenters, fine distinctions were made in the skills. The By-Laws opened membership to "mechanics, in the town of Catskill, who have arrived at the age of twenty-one years, and who are or have been masters or undertakers of any of the mechanical branches of business, Provided, that such masters or undertakers respectively sustain a good moral character, are honest, industrious and prudent, and will conform to the Charter and By-Laws of this Society."

The incomplete membership list follows:

blacksmith: Adonijah Baker, Ephraim Baker, John Hyde, Peter Osterhoudt, Jared Stocking, Jacob Van Valkenburgh
brickmaker: Eliphalet Webb
butcher: John Edsell
cabinet maker: John Bogardus Jr., James Cole, Ralph Olmstead
civil engineer: L. J. Germain
clock and watch maker: Jehiel Preston
coach smith: Fowler M. Ray
cooper (barrels and casks): Elisha Ferguson
cordwainer (leatherworker): John Blanchard, Lemuel Hall, Nathaniel Hinman, James Mahaffy, Isaac Nichols, P. M. Osborne, B. T. Rogers, Simeon Sanford, David Throp, Shadrack White
currier: Wm. P. Loomis
horologer (clock maker and seller): Samuel Mallory, Charles S. Willard
house joiner (framer): Nathaniel Ells, Herman Hinman, Linus Sage, Reuben Sanderson, Henry Selleck
house and ship joiner (framer): John Doan
housewright (including later term of carpenter): Hiram Comfort, John C. Peck, Peter Shourman, Hezekiah Thayer, Thomas Wright
machinist: S. W. Bullock
mason: James Bennet, Aaron Hall, Charles Jenkins
nailed (nail maker): Josiah Stebbins
painter and gilder: Peter Breasted, Caleb Crosswell
paper maker: Robinson Hazard
printer: Caleb Crosswell, Mackay Crosswell, John R. Sylvester
rope maker: Martin Freyer, John S. Olcott
saddler: Abijah Beach, Adonijah Bolen
ship carpenter (finished work): John Gager, John T. Lacy, Benjamin Sole
ship-wright (construction and repair): Matthew Bounds, Hiland Hill, Richard Hill, Francis Sayre
tailor: Nathaniel A. Hinman, Francis Story
tanner: Henry Ashley, Edm. Hatfield, Stephen Root
wagon maker: Hiram Friar
weaver: David Horton
wheel wright (maker and repairer of wheels and wheeled vehicles): Henry L'Homedieu

Until the building of Mechanics Hall on Court (later Bridge Street) in 1841, the Catskill Mechanical Society met in the large attic room at the inn of the Botsfords (corner of Main and Thompson Streets). This room was also the meeting place of the Masonic Lodge. Furnishings were meager and were described by Pinckney as consisting of "four raised desks and a number of hard-bottom, back-breaking benches."

Membership into the Society was by nomination and vote: honorary status was open to "any person residing in the village." Initiation fees were a matter of controversy. There were frequent proposals to amend the By-Laws to increase the amount from five dollars to eight or ten. New members were expected to make an initial deposit of two dollars but were not to be issued their Certificates of Membership until fully paid up. The earlier certificates were printed on a type of parchment paper but by 1839 the members were considering the use of a more inexpensive form.

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MECHANICAL SOCIETY *(continued from page 12)*

Like all organizations, the regular monthly meeting night was always unsatisfactory to some members; Tuesday evenings met with the least opposition. Those in attendance were expected to refrain from consuming spiritual liquors once the session was called to order. Offenders were subject to an initial fine of six cents; thereafter, repeaters had to pay 12½ cents the offense.

Once elected, there was a tendency to retain the same persons for several terms of office. Henry Ashley, John Blanchard and Francis Sayre were at the helm at various times. Assisting Francis Sayre in the vice presidency, was Peter Breasted, while Horace Willard assumed the treasurer's role and Ira Canfield the secretaryship. A stipend of twenty-five dollars was eventually attached to the treasurer's office to induce members to run for that position.

The treasury, over the years, managed to accumulate a substantial reserve which was "tapped" occasionally for needy apprentices, members or their families. Such financial assistance took two forms — outright grants or loans on 60 to 90-day notes bearing interest. Borrowers are listed in the minute book and include such names as John E. David, Elisha Meiggs, Nathaniel Hinman, Peter Shourman, Mackay Crosswell, Raymond Olmstead, Hiram Comfort and Mr. Bullock. It was an established practice to encourage borrowers to reduce their loans' face values before considering renewal requests.

As past due debts increased in amount and age, the members felt decisive action was essential to the welfare of the Society. Notes held from Raymond Olmstead, Hiram Comfort and Mackay Crosswell were "given up" (cancelled), while credits were granted on other notes. Mr. Bullock received a twenty-five dollar allowance on his. Lewis Germain was not as fortunate, the vote holding him to the full amount. The remaining notes were all cancelled as "uncollectible due to circumstances beyond [debtors'] control." Some widows and their children applied for and received assistance such as Mrs. Peter Shourman for seventy-five dollars in 1842.

In memory of the deceased, members were expected to attend funerals "in a body" and wear "crepe badges of mourning" for 30 days. Such a fraternal action was taken at the death of the Society's president, Henry Ashley, in 1827, as well as for William Seaman, Hiram Comfort and Nathaniel Hinman in 1841. Again for Peter Shourman in 1842.

The By-Laws stressed "visiting the sick members" but this was frequently disregarded. At one meeting Nathaniel Hinman felt it necessary to remind the Society it was negligent in this respect.

To celebrate its founding, an anniversary dinner was scheduled as a yearly event, generally in December. Speakers were drawn either from among the membership or from among the invited guests. Catskill clergy were always invited. As a compliment to the speaker, his address was subsequently printed by Mackay Crosswell and distributed. Members were encouraged to invite friends both to increase the evening's attendance and to "line up" prospective members if eligible. A few speakers' names survive:

Francis Sayre, Mackay Crosswell, J. Van Vleeck, and Zadock Pratt. Colonel Pratt held forth on December 29, 1842 after the Reverend David Murdock gave the invocation.

Mrs. Botsford, residing above the family's tavern catered the earlier dinners at a price of seventy-five cents the plate. At times the Society "shopped around" for better arrangements but with little success. Once Mechanics Hall was built the anniversary dinners could be served at fifty cents the person. Tickets were usually on sale at several places around the village three or four weeks before the December event.

From its earliest days, the Society sponsored the Apprentices Free Lending Library, the earliest public library in Catskill. It was viewed as a means of self-education for those individuals unable to find either the time or money to attend academies. All apprentices were extended library privileges "free of charge." Members of the Mechanical Society, in good standing, were also permitted to withdraw books for a yearly fee of fifty cents. Other Catskill village residents were charged "25¢ the octavo volume and 6¢ for the smaller books." The librarian was paid twenty-five dollars the year for which salary he was expected to open the lending library facility each Friday evening from 6 to 9 p. m. The turnover of librarians was frequent. The name of one survives — George M. Kendall.

The Apprentices Library Fund was a separate account maintained by the Society's treasurer and was used from time to time to meet bills. Four technical magazines were on the library's subscription list: Stillman's *Journal of Science and Arts*, *Journal of the Franklin Institute*, *Civil Engineering and Architectural Journal*, and the *London Mechanics Magazine*. The librarian was encouraged to secure donations for these subscriptions, the costs for each varying between four and six dollars the year.

The year 1839 appears to have been that library's "high tide" period. Readership increased in a year's time from 271 to 327, probably due to the acquisition of 75 new books. The Society, pleased with this report, voted funds for "a new bookcase or addition to the one already in use."

Member Germain, in speaking at one meeting, urged the organization to take action to acquire the mineral collection of the defunct Catskill Lyceum. "This would strengthen the holdings with a natural history collection." There is no indication this was followed through.

At least one catalogue of book titles and authors is known to have been printed by Sylvester and Crosswell. This was an effort by one librarian to increase circulation figures.

It has been ever thus! In taking inventory one year, 72 volumes were found to be missing. Readers frequently overlooked due dates.

Efforts were made to secure federal publications by letters to General Root and others. Henry Ashley,

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MECHANICAL SOCIETY *(continued from page 14)*

former congressman, donated his substantial collection, a collection returned to his widow, Susan, when the library was eventually closed down.

The establishment of the free District School Library sounded the death toll for the Apprentices Free Library and by the year 1854 it was concluded this early Catskill library had outlived its usefulness. A plan was drawn up to divide the library's holdings among the members, as well as with widows of deceased members, less those to be returned to Susan Ashley. The committee to oversee the distribution consisted of Hiram Friar, Henry Ashley (Jr.) and J. R. Sylvester.

By March, 1838, the Society began to consider the advisability of erecting its own meeting hall. To that purpose a committee was appointed, soon after enlarged to include Messers Hatfield and Crosswell. It was their responsibility to determine the feasibility of such a move and to report back. At the April 26, 1838 monthly meeting the proposed Mechanics Hall was the main topic of business. But the majority felt the construction and maintenance of such a building was too ambitious an undertaking. The plan to build such a hall again surfaced the following spring. A new committee, consisting of Messers Germain and Shourman, was instructed to investigate the prices of available building sites, the cost of various types of structures, and to ascertain the degree of interest of the village fire department in sharing such a new facility.

Slowly the idea of the new Mechanics Hall "jelled." In 1841 the village and the fire company authorized the construction of a brick structure on the south side of Court (now Bridge) Street. At its May 4, 1841 Society meeting, the members voted to offer village officials \$200 for the addition of a second story if that large meeting room could be under the control of the Catskill Mechanical Society. The proposal was acceptable to the village board and Mechanics Hall came into being. The rental to the Society was set at "one cent per annum."

With the hall completed, funds were voted to whitewash the rooms' walls, to construct book shelves, a coal bin, and to procure chairs, tables and lamps. A contract was entered into with the Howard Insurance Company, at a yearly premium of \$3.50, to insure the Society's property. The removal of the Apprentices Library to the new hall was debated and finally approved.

The new Mechanics Hall was available for rental purposes on evenings not in conflict with the Society's needs. Individuals and organizations desiring to rent were expected to contact President Francis Sayre, "fee payable in advance." In addition to the nominal charge, users were expected to leave the room in a clean, orderly condition. Mr. Jenkins was employed to act as a janitor for fifty cents the evening when the hall was in use. Over the years the

room was in use for such individuals as Professor Fiester who gave a series of lectures. The Society had an occasional charitable streak as when it let the hall without charge to Van Deusen, the blind singer, for a musical concert.

From its early years, the Mechanical Society sponsored lectures and a type of debate. Generally these were for the benefit of the members and took place at the regular monthly meetings. Topics were approved by the Society "as a committee of the whole." From the Minute Book one gains an understanding of the wide range of topics. Where indicated in the record, the winning side is listed:

- Is the light of Nature Sufficient to prove the immortality of the Soul?
- Would it be discreet and moral for the United States to influence and physically aid a neighboring nation?
- Is a Sedimentary vocation better adapted to develop powers of the mind than an active laborious pursuit?
- Which is the greater benefit to Society – the Practical or the Theoretical Man? (affirmative)
- Is the barbarian more hospitable than the civilized man?
- Is dueling under any circumstances justified? (affirmative)
- Are second marriages as conducive to happiness as first ones? (negative)
- Does a mechanic enjoy life as well as others? (affirmative)
- Was the Elective Franchise carried too far by the present constitution? (affirmative)
- Have the friends of Temperance benefited the cause, on the whole, by adopting the pledge of total abstinence? (affirmative)
- Is conscience the result of Education? (proposed by Charles S. Willard – negative side won)
- Are the Works of Nature more admired than those of Man? (negative)
- Ought the possession of riches to create distinctions in Society?
- Are the minds of Females as susceptible of Improvement as those of Males? (affirmative)
- Are the benefits to be derived by this state from Rail Roads probably greater than from Canals? (negative)
- Is the study of Phrenology useful to mankind? (negative)
- Are Dancing Schools on the whole beneficial to Society? (negative)
- Has Phrenology any justifiable claim to be treated as a science?
- Are Fairs for the raising of funds proper?
- Ought Mechanical labor be abolished in our State Prisons?
- Ought the present law against Lotteries be repealed? (negative)
- Would it be policy to pass a law to force the People to send their children to School?

The Society felt such activities as the above met the requirements of By-Law Seven. "Be it further ordained that to diffuse useful knowledge and to improve the members in speaking questions may be proposed and discussed, avoiding all political and religious disputes."

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TROLLEYS *(continued from page 11)*

Within a few weeks of the receivership sale, William C. Wood merged his interest with local Catskill businessmen. A new corporation, the Catskill Traction Company, was formed with William C. Wood as president and Robert Story as secretary. (George W. Holdridge had stepped down with the plea of "lack of time to devote to the line's operation.") A set of By-Laws for the new corporation was drawn up by Attorney Harold C. Mitchell, 60 Wall Street, New York. There were to be nine directors; the principal office of the company was designated as Catskill. Two standing committees (Executive and Examining) were specified. The directors were given the power to elect officers. A new franchise was soon forthcoming from Catskill, signed by clerk John McGee under date of May 14, 1910. The Honorable William P. Fiero, absent at the time of the reorganization of the trolley company, later suggested the new name be "The Catskill and Inter County Traction Company" as he believed the line should be extended on the south into Ulster County and on the north and west into Albany and Schoharie Counties. But others favored the name "The Catskill Traction Company" and that remained the line's new corporate title.

It was the plan of the newly organized corporation, if approved by not less than two-thirds of the stockholders, to secure \$400,000 in new capital through the Carnegie Trust Company. This was to be accomplished by that firm's underwriting the sale of 800, 30-year, 5% coupon bonds (par value \$500). These securities were to be protected by a mortgage or deed of trust upon all the property.

In April, 1910, the Public Service Commission approved this financial plan with some modifications. In addition to the bonds, \$48,000 of capital stock was to be sold. The proceeds of both were to be used to purchase from W. C. Wood property rights and franchises of the defunct Catskill Electric Railway Company. That state body also authorized the issuance of an additional \$12,000 in stock to pay for new pavement, changes in machinery at the power plant, organizational expenses and to provide working capital.

Coupled with the foregoing reorganization as the Catskill Traction Company came a renewed effort to persuade the Public Service Commission to grant permission to extend the present Catskill-Leeds line 6.7 miles to Cairo. For this purpose the owners proposed to sell preferred stock (par value \$100 the share). Subscribers would be expected to pay 10% in cash when signing the Stock Subscription agreement, 40% additional when the company had laid its tracks to South Cairo, 25% more when the line reached the Cairo Railroad crossing of the Susquehanna Turnpike just east of the village, and the final 25% when the company commenced operating the trolley line in the village of Cairo itself.

Optimism was again the order of the day. It was the announced intention of the new owners to purchase new equipment and rolling stock, build a new powerhouse, extend the road to Cairo and ultimately connect with Middleburg. The Cairo residents were jubilant. Catskill capital was now in control! An unidentified Oak Hill resident was quoted as promising "that when Catskill puts the trolley in front of Walters Hotel at Cairo, I'll put it in Oak Hill."

In the Raymond Plank Memorial Collection at the Vedder Memorial Library are several private property rights-of-way consents. Among the names we read those of Joseph Burroughs, Charles F. Sherman, Sanford Duncan, Ira B. Phinney, Mary E. Anable, Charles W. Fiero, Mary J. Wolcott, H. F. Vedder and Jesse T. Teetsel. Part of this extended line would be constructed along the public highway and part over private land. It would parallel the Catskill and Cairo Railroad under lease to the Catskill Mountain Railway Company.

The Certificate of Extension filed with the Public Service Commission on July 13, 1910, detailed that proposed route from Cairo to Oak Hill:

Commencing at a point on the highway formerly known as the Susquehanna Turnpike, at or near the premises of the Greene County Agricultural Society, commonly known as the Fair Grounds, at Cairo, Greene County, New York, and thence upon the surface of, in, over, along and upon a continuation of said highway, formerly known as the Susquehanna Turnpike, in a westerly direction, to a point at or near the centre of the Village known as Oak Hill, Greene County, New York. The length of said proposed branch or extension will be about twelve miles.

The Public Service Commission's public hearing covering the trolley line's extension from Leeds to Cairo and beyond was a heated one; tempers flared. Percy W. Decker was engaged to represent the Catskill Traction interests while Lewis E. Carr and John MacLean were hired to defend those of the Catskill Mountain Railway. The points presented by the Catskill Traction Company can be summarized as follows:

1. There was a lack of railroad facilities for the villages of Cairo and South Cairo except in summer;
2. That the Catskill Mountain Railway did not serve as a reasonable means of communication between the villages of Cairo, South Cairo, and Leeds;
3. That the passenger rates of the Catskill Mountain Railway were very high as compared with other railroads;
4. That the Catskill Mountain Railway had no direct communication with the West Shore Railroad, the Catskill Traction Company being the only railroad in Catskill now having direct passenger connection with the West Shore road, and was perfecting arrangements for shipping freight across the West Shore platform;

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TROLLEYS (continued from page 15)

5. That a large number of persons owning real estate had consented in writing to an extension along the highways.

Additional testimony at the hearing before J.

C. Finch, brought out:

1. The Catskill Traction Company would be standard gauge track while the Catskill Mountain Railway was a three-foot gauge;
2. The proposed street railway fares were to be 30 cents each way – there would be six five-cent zones for the 12 miles. (The Railroad was charging \$1 each way or \$1.10 the round trip.);
3. The Catskill Mountain Railway was not operating five months of the year, requiring teams of horses to haul freight for that time period;
4. There were 6 stages operating on a daily round trip basis between Cairo and Catskill and about 14 teams carrying freight;
5. The present line summer schedule to Leeds by the Street Railway was 30 minutes each way in the forenoon and from 20 to 30 minutes in the afternoon. It was proposed to have 6 round trips to Cairo per day with hourly service during operating hours;
6. The street railway predicted it would attract a yearly freight load of at least 39,500 tons. Additionally, it hoped to secure a U. S. mail contract for \$750 the year. Furthermore, it would schedule direct connections with the West Shore Railroad, the Catskill-Greendale Ferry, and the Hudson River Day and Evening Lines. (The Catskill Traction Company had, from August 2, 1911 to the latter part of November of that year, been operating an auto stage between Leeds and Cairo.)

Charles A. Beach, the Catskill Mountain Railway superintendent, presented forceful arguments against the proposed traction line extension. He stressed the decline in population since 1865, the area now averaging less than 20 persons per square mile. Farming was a declining source of revenue, giving way to a 3-months summer boarding business. He questioned what he felt to be optimistic traction company estimates of potential income from freight and passengers. "There is not sufficient business for two lines – both will go bankrupt! The new proposed line cannot operate with profit at 30¢ fare." Beach further made reference to the ill-fated Canajoharie and Catskill Railroad generations earlier and to the recent failure of the Shale Brick Company.

The Catskill Traction Company provided the Public Service Commission with a wealth of statistical information, among which were passenger and fare summaries:

	1910	1908	1906	1904
Earnings in dollars	20,824	17,024	17,233	12,434
5-cent fares (zoned)	400,872	336,688	319,638	(not given)
Passengers carried				
incl. passes	418,865	334,344	340,565	242,850

The Applicant stated the towns of Catskill and Cairo had granted franchise rights. Cairo's, signed

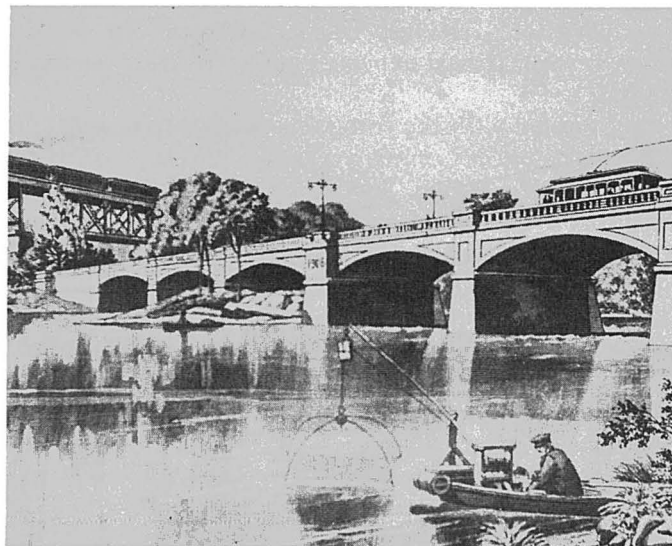
by George B. Van Valkenburgh, Clerk, and dated July 9, 1910, was signed with the proviso that the street railway use the center of the road from the Purling road to a point west of the bridge over the Shinglekill Creek; that the company strengthen the bridge over the Shinglekill Creek if necessary; and that they construct the road in South Cairo as to permit the wagons crossing the same safely. These terms were agreeable to the Catskill Traction Company.

The cost of construction of the proposed extension from Leeds to Cairo was estimated to amount to \$126,679.60. The breakdown is incomplete but included:

grading and tracking	\$64,658.50
overhead construction and electrical work	15,829.50
freight stations, private rights-of-way, secondhand cars	10,200.00

The Public Service Commission on January 11, 1912, ruled in favor of the Catskill Traction Company, much to the anger of the Catskill Mountain Railroad Company. But the Commission's favorable decision was negated in part by the specification to reduce the size of the bond offering and calling for the sale of stock shares instead. Unable to raise the capital needed, the line to Cairo was never built. Preferred stock subscriptions had been slow to come in and were generally limited to one or two shares per person. One reads such names of subscribers as G. F. Walters, Adelbert Lennon, R. A. Austin, Louis Schoenfield, Howard K. Lyon, Gaston W. Wynkoop, William Stephens, Samuel B. Miller and Henry Chadderdon. A majority of these men resided in the Cairo, Acra and Purling areas.

The earlier sale of the gold bonds through the Carnegie Trust Company (5%, 30-year, first mortgage) had been only partially successful to secure adequate capital to renovate the line and replace the equipment between Catskill and Leeds. The bond sale raised \$51,000, the securities selling at 85% of par.



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TROLLEYS (continued from page 16)

Few opportunities were overlooked to increase revenue. In August, 1910, the Catskill Traction Company contracted with George Kissam & Company, granting that firm exclusive advertising rights on the local street cars. The rate was set at \$200 the year, with an extra allowance if more than four cars were in regular operation. To close the gap for travelers between Cairo and Leeds, the street railway company advertised its operation of a bus (stage) line between those two places. Twelve round trips weekly were scheduled. In addition to passengers, the United States mail and light freight were transported. Fred Weeks of Cairo agreed to carry the mail and packages, together with the passengers, but he would not "operate on Sundays."

In conjunction with street railway operations around the state, rural "electric parks" were developed to provide recreational opportunities for urban families; it also meant additional fares for the street railways! On the Catskill Creek, east of Leeds, the Rip Van Winkle Park came into being. The *Coxsackie Union*, in its issue of July 22, 1910, reported "the Leeds Rip Van Winkle Park is now open to the public and the trolley runs out every 20 minutes Sundays. Lots of people go there. Leeds has become Catskill's Coney Island. Every evening and Sunday the electric railway is taxed to its capacity to carry the people to that little village." (Research has not yet revealed if 1910 was the park's first year of operation.) In 1911 Mary Phelan leased the Rip Van Winkle Park to the Catskill Traction Company at terms which seem very modest today. The rental was \$25 in 1911, \$50 in 1912, and thereafter for the next two years, she was to get a yearly increase of \$10 the season. The low rental was partially offset by the traction company's paying the land taxes.

Social groups were encouraged to "ride the trolleys." Some hiked one way and rested their feet on the return. Eugene Wolfe of Athens in late July, 1910, treated the Athens band to an outing, first a Hudson River ride in his yacht *Idle Hour*, then supper at Catskill, followed by a trolley ride. When Andrew Wise and his friends from Hudson came down on the steamship *Isabella* one Sunday morning in September, they took a trip into the mountains by steam railroad but ended up with a return ride on the street railway.

The Catskill Traction Company was even known to sponsor outdoor dramatic performances at the Rip Van Winkle Park, George Ober and His Sylvan Players being engaged for evenings' entertainment. Tickets could be procured for fifty cents (reserved seats one dollar) at the traction company office. If the *Rivals* was too worldly a play, patrons could select *Rip Van Winkle*.

Hotels and boarding houses stressed their desirable locations along the transit line. The Grant House (site of present Memorial Hospital) in its 1909 brochure informed the public it was "Ten Minutes

by Trolley from the Day Line Landing." Boarders coming by way of the West Shore Railroad were certain to find the trolley schedule was coordinated with the trains' arrivals and departures.

RIP VAN WINKLE PARK
On the Catskill Trolley Line
Wednesday and Thursday Evenings
AUGUST 16th and 17th

The Catskill Traction Co. Presents
MR. GEORGE OBER
And His Sylvan Players
IN OPEN-AIR PERFORMANCES OF
Rip Van Winkle
Wednesday Evening, August 16th

"The Rivals" THURSDAY EVENING **Aug. 17**

Admission, 50c. Reserved Seats, \$1.00
Combination Tickets, including Reserved Seats for both performances, \$1.50

SEATS ON SALE after July 25th at the office of the Catskill Traction Company, 393 Main Street, Catskill. BOTH PHONES



Van Gorden & Co. post card view of upper Catskill Bridge area. The long brick building with the idle trolley car along the east side appears to be the car barn and former powerhouse. The relocation of the Jefferson Hill main road and the tendency of post card printers to modify scenes to meet their "artistic" needs causes uncertainty as to the exact location of the car barn at the foot of Jefferson Hill.

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TROLLEYS (continued from page 17)

Passenger lawsuits were a continuous problem for the company. Dr. J. Francis Ward of Brooklyn, alleging sustained injuries resulting from a street car derailment at Leeds on August 3, 1912, took the line to court. He sought to prove injuries: a dislocated knee-cap, contusions and strains of the left ankle and tendons, contusions of the right elbow, as well as shock. The Catskill Traction Company, while acknowledging the derailment, denied any responsibility. "The trolley tracks where the derailment occurred are in the public highway which is now a State Road and crushed stone had been recently put in the road to be top-dressed with asphalt and gravel or fine stone, the work being in progress. A few of the crushed stones had been pushed over against the rail of the trolley track, evidently by a passing vehicle, either a wagon or automobile. One of the stones caused the forward section of the car to leave the rails. From this statement of the facts which you can easily verify, we respectfully submit that the derailment was not the fault of the railroad company." The case was settled in favor of the local corporation.

Turnover of employees over the years was extensive. The names of a few are mentioned here and elsewhere. L. S. Betts of Cairo, formerly employed by the Metropolitan Street Railroad Company, was hired as a motorman. He operated the first car run over the roadbed. A Mr. Hollenbeck, residing on Catskill's Allen Street, first accepted employment as a conductor but soon changed his mind and remained with the Boughton Store. Fred Kerr, Upper Spring Street, took a conductor's job as did Earl Van Dyke. When the latter became ill, Joshua Travis substituted. E. C. Titus was functioning as a conductor in August, 1901; as was Ray Castle. The General Superintendent of the Catskill Electric Railway Company was the aforementioned Daniel W. Sharpe. While in Catskill, he and his family rented the residence of Mrs. J. L. Stryker on Upper Spring Street.

A typed report, dated January 1, 1915, labeled "Summary of Business of Catskill Traction Co. for Year 1914" survives. Income is recorded from July 18th through December, indicating the shaky financial situation and the insolvency condition. It also indicates a period of suspended operations during receivership proceedings.

Income - Passengers Freight		Disbursements Electrical Power	
June 18th-30th	621.10	June	188.35
July	2708.03	July	567.84
August	3395.25	August	610.73
September	1710.05	September	517.78
October	917.50	October	425.00
November	675.75	November	418.00
December	636.15	December	438.34
Total	10663.83		3166.04

Insurance Premiums		Disbursements Taxes	
Buildings and Cars	243.00	Back Taxes 1913	328.85
Employees	197.76	Franchise Tax	139.06
Total	440.76	Gross Earnings Tax	134.31
		Village School Tax	124.43
		School District 10	20.24
		School District 11	15.23
		Water Tax	6.00
			768.12

Average Payroll in Height of Season for Operation of Cars

Per Week		
Conductors and Motormen (all at 18¢ the hour)		
Brandow	93 hrs.	16.74
Morehouse	86½ hrs.	15.52
Spencer	58½ hrs.	10.53
Bordt	55½ hrs.	10.00
M. Overbaugh	80 hrs.	14.40
R. Grobe	88 hrs.	15.54
P. Johnson	79½ hrs.	14.31
F. Dedrick	12 hrs.	2.16
F. Overbaugh	91 hrs.	16.38
Van Wart	53 hrs.	9.54
Total		125.12
Car Barn Employees		
Rightmyer	87 hrs. — .20¢	17.40
Purdy	89 hrs. — .23¢	20.47
F. Grobe	per week	12.00
Dedrick (bookkeeper)		12.00
Total		61.87

Average Payroll at present time for operation of cars per week \$90.

Cash on Hand January 5, 1915:

Receivers Account	912.16
Operating Account	1025.95
Total	1938.11

The closing chapter of the insolvent Catskill Traction Company began at 2 o'clock on the afternoon of October 23, 1917. A large crowd, consisting of junk dealers, legal representatives of the creditors, newspaper reporters, and the curious, were on hand. Referee O. T. Heath announced the conditions of sale, including the \$1,572.53 lien held by the Village of Catskill for the repaving between the street railway tracks. The opening bid was for \$15,000; it rose in stages. S. S. Stern, representing Joseph Joseph & Brothers Company of New York was the top bidder at \$27,000. With the World War I demand for metal, the line was felt to be worth more for scrap than as a going concern.

Joseph Joseph & Brothers lost little time in tearing up the rails. The work began at Leeds on November 17, the crew under foreman Roop ripping several hundred yards of rails each day. It had been anticipated by the local observers that the rails would be moved to Catskill Point on the line's own rolling stock. Instead, heavy trucking wagons were put to use. The rail sections each weighed approximately 600 pounds; a team was able to pull 10 rails the trip. From Catskill Point the scrap metal was shipped by water to the State of Maryland.

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VEDDER LIBRARY NOTES

□◇ John F. Morley Sr., a helpful genealogist from Sayre, Pennsylvania, has supplied the library with his notes relating to the *Descendants of Jacob Hoose, A Soldier of the War of 1812*. He is anxious to correspond with Hoose, Hoos surnames. He may be reached at 355 Loder Street, South Waverly, Sayre, Pennsylvania 18840.

□◇ From various families connected with the inactive Natural Science Association of the Catskills, the library is accumulating substantial paper material. A Journal article may be forthcoming on Professor Chadwick and his associates.

□◇ The *Ulster Genie*, Volume IX, No. 3, Jan. 1986, a genealogical publication of the Ulster County Genealogical Society, has been received. It is a useful publication. Their summary of the nature of the various census records is a concise reference aid. Also intriguing is the genealogical query about Florence Hattie Lake, born 1866 Catskill. She left New York in 1881 to become a governess to the Townsend family who settled Bismarck, N. D.

□◇ Material relating to Jacob Van Loon (Van Loan) whose homestead farm was on the Schoharie Turnpike near the Four Corners east of Route 9-W, has been filed. It is primarily relating to land transfers but from it one gains genealogical information on this branch of the Van Loan family.

□◇ The On-ti-Ora Chapter, National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, is sponsoring the VML for a yearly subscription to its national magazine which is increasingly useful to genealogists and students of history.

□◇ A Beers' *History of Greene County*, the 1884 edition, is donated to the Society by Dorothy Sherman Slatterly in Memory of Blanche Sherman Kleeman. It came down in the Holcomb – Sherman families of Windham.

□◇ "Oration of Hon. Lyman Tremain, delivered at Oak Hill, Greene County, N. Y., July 4th, 1851. Published by request. Catskill, Trowbridge & Gunn, printers, 1851", has been acquired from Hope Farm Bookshop.

□◇ The Library maintains a file on historic properties of Greene County. The latest to be added are the applications of the Peter Houghtaling Farm and Lime Kiln (now owned by Lee Adler, town of New Baltimore) and the Adams' Farview (now owned by Le Madabeth, Inc., Route 385, Coxsackie) for favorable consideration by the National Register of Historic Places.

□◇ From Joseph Ray Furshong, Helena, Montana, comes duplicated copies of family correspondence dated from the middle decades of the nineteenth century. They are written to Frederick Overbagh Rechtmyer (1819-?), by his brother and various sisters. The one branch finally settled in Texas. The letters mention local personages and happenings in the eastern section of Greene County. The donor also enclosed genealogical material relating to the Rightmer (Rightmyer, Rechtmyer) family.

□◇ The Salisbury-Newkirk Collection mentioned heretofore, is in memory of Beulah Hunter Rapp, mother of Marvin M. Rapp and Trudy Rapp Griffith. She states no one has ever translated the genealogical Dutch or Germanic entries in the Bibles. That would be a good project for some linguist.

□◇ The construction of the Ashokan Reservoir is a vague memory for many older residents; the reservoir area is still an attraction for Sunday drivers. The VML has an assortment of related materials concerning this water supply for NYC. A recent acquisition is Bob Steuding's *The Last of the Handmade Dams – The Story of the Ashokan Reservoir*.

□◇ The County of Greene and the Greene County Historical Society (VML) are participating in a joint venture to organize and make available for research that portion of the county inactive archives having historical value. This is a long-term project with substantial monetary savings to county taxpayers. It again points up the need for a fire-resistant, climatic controlled facility.

□◇ With its limited budget, the Vedder Memorial Library was unable to secure Greene County material which came up at the Savoia and Fromm auction in February. But there was one exception! An absentee bid for lot #109 labeled "stampless covers" (letters folded in lieu of envelopes) was successful. One letter, dated November 10, 1834, was written by Cuyler Van Dyck, son of Coxsackie's attorney, Abraham Van Dyck. It is addressed to his cousin, Leonard Bronk, then in residence at Union College, Schenectady. The other letter, dated February 19, 1842, was written to Abraham Varick, Jr. of Poughkeepsie. Margaret Bronk, daughter of John L. and Alida Conine Bronk married Abraham Varick.

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MECHANICAL SOCIETY (continued from page 14)

The latest inventions and patents aroused substantial interest among the membership. At the meeting of September 27, 1838, on motion of Mackay Crosswell, a committee was appointed to examine the improvements of member L. J. Germain (Civil Engineer) "in the construction of springs in Rail Road Carriages" and to report back. A standing patents committee, consisting of Messers S. W. Bullock, L. J. Germain and Jacob Van Valkenburgh, was established in January, 1840.

The final years of this Mechanical Society are uncertain. From Charles S. Willard's papers, one gains the impression the years of the Civil War saw its demise. The last member recorded as joining was John A. Cole in 1842. Obviously there was an earlier Minute Book, treasurers' records, printed by-laws and speeches, library catalogue and annual anniversary programs. Have any survived? What about a few membership certificates? The Greene County Historical Society would appreciate knowing their whereabouts either in private or public collections.

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TROLLEYS *(continued from page 18)*

By December 21, 1917, the employees of the wrecking company completed the work of taking down the almost six miles of copper wire from Leeds to Catskill Point and from the main line to the West Shore Station. The following year the rolling stock was dismantled for its junk value.

These final years of the Catskill Traction Company were equally as dismal for its rival, the Catskill Mountain Railroad. In April, 1917, that line was bid in for junk by the same Joseph Joseph Brothers firm for \$28,300. That line got a short reprieve due to the legal technicalities (the Public Service Commission refusing to approve the "junking of the railroad.") Instead, the Olcott and Beach interests took over. But the reprieve was a short one. On December 21, 1919, with the war over, M. K. Frank, Pittsburgh, bought out the Hudson River Dayline interest for the road's junk value. The Public Service Commission had finally realized the futility of maintaining steam railroad operations on that Catskill Mountain line.

Rivals during their years of existence, the only street electric railway ever built in Greene County and the more scenic Catskill Mountain Railroad (including the Otis) are now rapidly fading memories for the county's older residents.

The Raymond Plank Memorial Collection, the Jessie Van Vechten Vedder Collection, the Pulver-Stiefel and Predecessors Collection, as well as the county newspapers, all at the Greene County Historical Society's Vedder Memorial Library, have been utilized for research purposes.

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CATSKILL'S FENCE VIEWERS

"Good fences make good neighbors" wrote the poet Robert Frost, a truism long held by local townships as year after year they elected men to the position of Fence Viewers. Their duties were to advise on problems arising during the construction of fences and inspecting same after completion. Claims for damages to gardens and cultivated fields by wandering livestock were allowed or disallowed on the basis of the decisions of the Fence Viewers.

Through surviving manuscripts in the Thomson-Cole family papers, two Catskill Fence Viewers can be identified — James Bennett and Francis Botsford; the year was 1808. John Alexander Thomson called upon these two men "to view the fence around my garden and to express damage done by a cow taken in damages and impounded by me belonging to Elisha Ferguson." At that time the Thomsons were still living on Catskill's Main Street. After viewing Thomson's fence, the officials agreed it was a substantial one, granting John A. Thomson \$1.50 in monetary damages.

Between the years 1811 and 1813, John A. Thomson, acting for his brother, Thomas T. Thomson of Demarara, South America, entered into an agree-

ment with Joseph Moore to build a fence upon the north line of Lot #2, in the second division of Lindsey's Patent. This fence was to run on both sides of the Albany and Greene Turnpike (now Route 385). In addition to the builders' agreement, the Moores and Thomsons agreed to keep the fence in good repair or to pay all damages sustained in consequence of neglect.

Upon completion of the work in 1813, Catskill's then-elected Fence Viewers, Wilkes Hyde and William Dobson, were called upon to inspect the new fence. In their written report, which survives, they found the new fence to be satisfactory, that title to 50½ rods on the east should be vested in the Moore family and 50½ rods on the west in the Thomsons. It was further noted that one small section of the fence was illegally built on land belonging to the turnpike corporation.

In the year 1839 more fence problems arose for the Thomsons. John A. Thomson saw a need to enclose acreage bounded on the north by the Cross Road leading from the turnpike to Jefferson Village. In a written notice to Darrow Benham, Thomson explained the need to agree upon a plan of fence division and also that Benham must complete his unfinished section of said fence. Thomson further warned that if the fence was not completed, he would hold Mr. Benham responsible for the cost of completing the same.

From a study of other surviving manuscripts, one concludes the Fence Viewer's job was frequently an attempt to get conflicting parties to compromise. If they could not, the law would take its course. Furthermore, it stressed the responsibility of the livestock owner to maintain decent fencing to prevent his animals from straying. The early pioneer custom of allowing livestock to forage without restraint was at an end.

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