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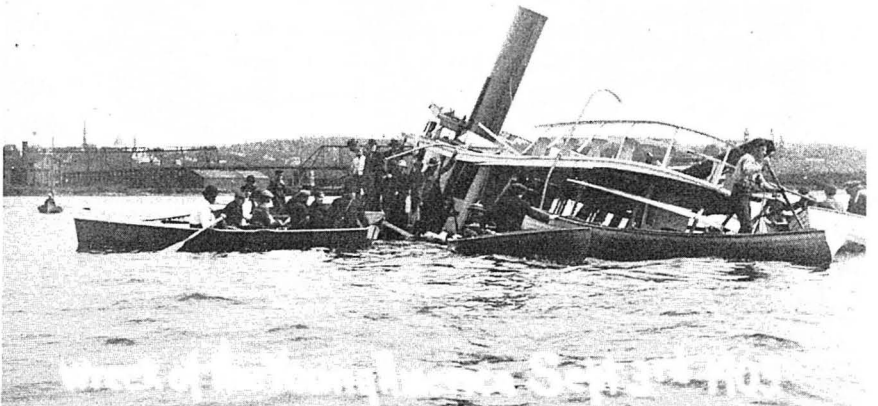
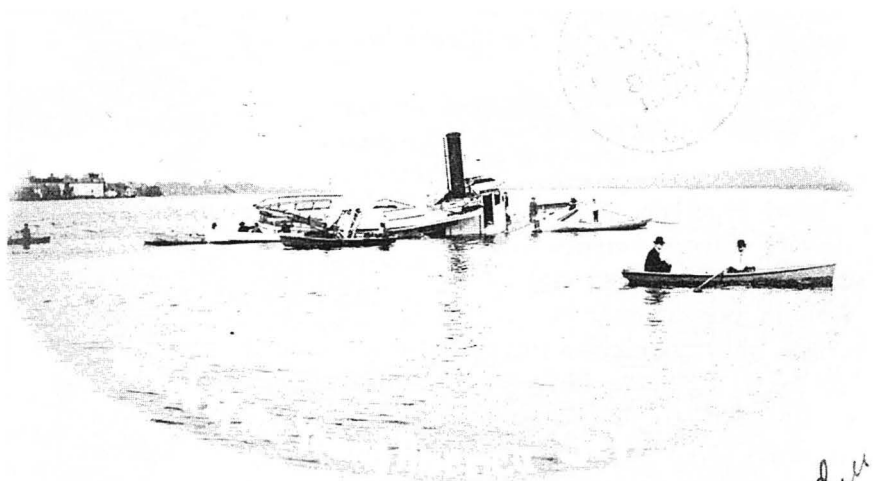
## THE 1905 COLLISION OF THE GEORGE H. POWER AND THE YOUNG AMERICA

—Raymond Beecher

It was a quiet Sunday afternoon that September 3rd and Bertha Best, the keeper's daughter, was attempting to wile away the time by glancing out the north window of the family quarters in the Athens-Hudson Lighthouse. Little did she realize just how much excitement would soon take place almost in their "front yard." And so she watched the ferryboat *George H. Power* and the passenger launch *Young America* head for the channel short cut in the Hudson River just north of the lighthouse. Both boats had left the Athens shore within a few minutes of each other; there was an intense rivalry for the passenger traffic and both vessels were losing little time in steaming for the Hudson Landing.

The lighthouse keeper, Francis Best, Jr., was first alerted to the potential for a disaster when he heard the loud cheers of the passengers in what appeared to be a race for the eastern shore. Aware of the unusually swift flow of the tide that day, he immediately sensed trouble and rushed to lower the keeper's launch for any needed rescue attempt of passengers and crews. Neither father nor daughter heard any warning bells or whistles before the coping of the *George H. Power* struck the *Young America*. Upon impact the latter toppled over and sank rapidly. Four persons were drowned: Mrs. Jennie S. and Miss Mary Bedell of New York City, Miss Sadie Brown of Brooklyn, and Margaret Kelly of Coxsackie. The newspaper reports later mentioned the death of Mrs. James B. McKnight of Coxsackie (it is uncertain if this was the Margaret Kelly referred to in the first newspaper article). The bodies were later recover-

(continued on page 2)



## COLLISION OF GEORGE H. POWER *(from page 1)*

ed in the east channel; the *Young America's* pilot house, smokestack and part of the rear deck remained above shallow water.

The authorities were soon debating whether Greene or Columbia County should conduct the inquest but with the recovery of the bodies in the Columbia County section of the river, that task fell to Hudson Coroner Lisk. A second investigation was later started in Albany by the Steamboat Inspectors Keller and Saul to ascertain if the rules and regulations of that department had been obeyed. Had the two boats been racing?

During the Coroner's inquest, Miss Bertha Best was the star witness and in a deliberate manner gave her version of events, adding that after the *Young America* was hit, it turned broadside and headed downstream before sinking.

Cortez L. Buckman who had been sitting on the right hand forward upper deck of the *Young America* testified that when they left Athens the ferryboat was on the left and close behind. He saw no indication of a race. The impact of the collision threw him into the water; he managed to escape drowning and assisted other victims; he denied hearing any warning signals.

Robert P. Dormandy testified he was also a passenger on the *Young America*, had seated himself on the starboard side near the smokestack until the boats came together. When near the lighthouse, he stated, the *Young America* was just ahead of the ferryboat but when both boats were about to make the turn in the channel between the flats and the lighthouse, they were close together. He was thrown into the river but managed to grasp the floating gang plank. It was Mr. Dormandy's opinion that the victims drowned between the two vessels.

Some limited information was secured from Frank R. Macy who had also been on the upper deck of the *Young America* — he added that the *Young America* was struck in the middle of the port side, and that the ferry immediately reversed its engines after the collision.

Enjoying a Sunday afternoon boat ride on the Hudson in their own boat were James I. Ham and a companion. Ham believed the two boats to have been racing: "The *Young America* submerged before the *George H. Power* stopped its wheels."

Counselor Charles Nichols of Catskill was in attendance at the Coroner's inquest, representing the owners of the *Young America*. On his advice, some witnesses refused to answer specific questions. But the *Young America's* deckhand, Leonard B. Edwards did testify that his boat was ahead before

both reached the lighthouse. He thought they were about one hundred feet from the building when struck, the blow being received on the top deck aft of the smokestack. He refused to answer, on advice of counsel, if the *Young America* had been moved from the position when first found sinking.

Other passengers could add little to the earlier testimony. There was little agreement as to whether the boat had been racing or not.

Ernest McKnight, pilot of the *George H. Power*, claimed his boat left Athens a moment before the *Young America*; he alleged the smaller boat caught up and attempted to cross the ferry's bow. The wheel was thrown hard but the pilot of the *Young America* kept crowding until they struck. (James B. McKnight, a passenger on the *Young America*, whose wife lost her life, claimed the *Young America* also crowded the ferryboat for some distance.)

The final witness was Captain Alexander Rainey, pilot of the *Young America*. He testified that neither boat gave signals. He was looking ahead and did not hear anyone shout out a warning nor did he signal for more steam.

The Steamboat Inspectors' hearing called nine witnesses; there was no cross examination. From that hearing we learn that Charles Webber was part owner of the *Young America*, that Alexander Rainey was the pilot, Morris Webber the engineer, and Leonard Edwards the deckhand. Frank Beardslly captained the ferryboat; it was piloted by Ernest McKnight. The engineer was Jacob Van Loan and the deckhand Thomas Rainey.

It was established that the accident occurred in the Greene County section of the Hudson River. This was important since it mandated responsibility for the trial for manslaughter if matters went that far. Such trials are costly.

The Albany hearing found both pilots guilty and revoked their licenses. Both men appealed that decision. (Both pilots had been implicated in a 1902 collision between the *Isabella* and the ferryboat).

The Coxsackie newspaper editor strongly supported Pilot Rainey, blaming the ferryboat crew. He maintained that Rainey's boat was running ahead and not interfering with the *George H. Power*. But the Supervising Inspector disagreed; he was responsible for the appeal hearing. While he found both pilots guilty, he found Pilot McKnight only partially guilty and Captain Rainey wholly to blame. The former had his license suspended for 18 months, the latter indefinitely.

The *Young America* was raised from the riverbed, repaired, and placed in service with a new name — the *Romona*.

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## BUILDER BEARDSLEY AND HIS CATSKILL HOUSES

—E. S. Minerley

Mr. and Mrs. C. W. Beardsley have gone down in Greene County history as purchasers in 1909 of the old County Jail which they remodeled into an exclusive hotel, the Heidelberg Inn. However, it is not as widely known that Mr. Beardsley was also a builder of fine houses. For many years the plumbing and hardware store of C. W. Beardsley was located at the corner of Main and Thompson Streets where Newberry's now operates its retail establishment. Letters written by the late Mrs. Edna Beardsley Fenn chronicle her father's building activities and the succession of impressive residences the family occupied in Catskill during a period of nearly 50 years.

In 1887 Mr. Beardsley built a house on the corner of Broad and Clark Streets — later the home of Florence Fiero; then a house on King Street, opposite York, sold to Philip Van Orden. He had also purchased the lot on Liberty Street between the home of Colonel B. B. G. Stone and Mr. Hayes.

Mrs. Fenn wrote, "We moved next to the Breasted home on Prospect Avenue between Robert Seaman's and General W. S. C. Wiley, both now called Paray Rest. In the meantime my father had built the house on the corner of King and Liberty Streets, sold in 1895 to Charles and Mattie Congdon Beach. From there we moved into the Cheritree cottage on Prospect Avenue, between Walton Van Loan's house (later owned by Percy Decker), and the Cheritree house on the corner of Prospect Avenue and Harrison Avenue. That cottage was later moved to Harrison Avenue and was owned by Henry Spencer.

"By the time the house at the corner of King and Clark Streets — 24 King Street — was finished, we lived there until 1904. When the house at 11 King Street was completed we moved there to remain until 1910, when the house was sold to M. E. Silberstein. (This lot was between Babcock's house and Ahreet's house).

"In the meantime my mother had purchased the old County Jail and had it remodeled into a small exclusive hotel which was called the Heidelberg Inn; it was opened July 1, 1912, operated by my mother until 1921, and then sold to Robert Henke of New York City. My parents then purchased the Judge Mattice house at 65 Greene Street on the corner of Broad, which was sold in 1936 to Dr. R. McCartney of the Coxsackie Vocational Institution. My father died in June, 1933."

From a glassed-in tower on the second floor of this house was a fine view of the mountains to the west. In the dining room's bay window was a large

aquarium built in 1899; it had an iron bottom and corners of iron cast in pairs at the foundry and put together with rivets.

A fine piece of furniture in the east corner of the library was a tall grandfather's clock, complete with rising and setting sun and moon, chiming the quarter hours. Mr. Beardsley like to tell how when it was being carried by hand to Prospect Avenue, he and his son were stopped on Bridge Street by some one who thought they were carrying a coffin.

Mrs. Fenn wrote that she gave the leg irons and chains used in the old County Jail to the Bronck Museum in Coxsackie; the commitment papers for people jailed for debt, covering the years 1815 to 1830, were given to the New York State Library. In the old days, she said in her letter, "you couldn't get away with not paying your debts, but were nabbed and put in the pokey."

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## PRESIDENT KRIELE REPORTS TO THE MEMBERSHIP

Another year, the 52nd of service to Greene County in the cause of local history, is rapidly drawing to a close. It has been a year of activities which saw members, volunteers and local residents participate in a wide range of entertaining, and we hope educational activities sponsored by this Society.

Spring brought the annual Home Tour of historic sites of architectural significance; this time the locale was in the township of Durham. Local residents generously opened their homes and worked closely with Board of Trustee members Reuben Garcia, Betty Miller, Betty Gustavson and Kathryn von Schenk to bring about an enjoyable day. Appreciation is also expressed to the Durham Center Museum for the use of its facilities.

The last Sunday in June marked the opening of the Bronck Museum. This season, as in past years, Mrs. Bogert, Mrs. Frances Adams and Mrs. Ellen Whitbeck served as docents for the guided tours. Special arrangements were made for groups both before and after the normal museum season. Mrs. Ellen Whitbeck makes an effective chairman of the Museum Committee.

Each summer afternoon the Pieter Bronck Trading Post was open for business offering for sale a potpourri of items — some old and some nearly new. A special feature for 1981 was the local history book section. The Trading Post got off to an excellent start with the spring tag sale. This, together with the summer's operation, brought in a substantial contribution to the budget needs. The work of the volunteers is most appreciated. Looking ahead to 1982, we remind readers that merchandise, other

(continued on page 10)

## GREENE COUNTY AND THE SUFFERING GREEK CAUSE

—Raymond Beecher

When the temporary committee at Catskill extended an invitation to Dr. Howe to be the speaker at their meeting in behalf of the "suffering Greeks," they were hopeful his remarks might serve as the catalyst for positive action; they were not to be disappointed. On that first Saturday evening in April, 1828, Samuel Gridley Howe, the noted American philanthropist, could speak from first-hand experience. In 1824, fired with enthusiasm, like the English poet Lord Byron, he had sailed for that Turkish province whence he enrolled as a surgeon in the patriot army. After witnessing horrendous incidents between Greeks and Turks, he had returned to America to promote the Greek War of Independence. He brought back with him the helmet and sword of Lord Byron who had died in Greece.

Dr. Howe was one of the more important American personages ever to visit Catskill. For those who heard his Catskill speech in 1828, his subsequent career was a fascination. He went on to found the Boston Institution for the Blind, and another for the education and care of the mentally deficient. At other times he traveled abroad on behalf of the Poles, and for the Cretans in their struggle with the Turks. The welfare of the negro was another of his causes — he being a leader in the antislavery movement. When the Civil War broke out, Dr. Howe was foremost in promoting the sanitary movement (nursing) for the sick and wounded soldiers. He was also among the first to publish a book of raised letters so that the blind might read. Throughout his humanitarian career, Dr. Howe was strongly supported by his wife, Julia Ward Howe, the poetess and authoress. She is remembered for her *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, as well as for her efforts in behalf of woman's rights.

The *Greene County Republican* newspaper had kept its local readers informed concerning Dr. Howe's efforts. In its issue of February 27, 1828 we read:

Dr. Howe, lately arrived at New York from Greece, has in his possession the helmet of Lord Byron. It is surmounted with a crest and plume, and on a plate in front, the arms of the Byrons are attached in embossed silver. It was given by Byron, just before his death, to a young Greek who was in his family. The sword belonging formerly to Lord Byron is also in Dr. Howe's custody. Mr. Miller, to whom it now belongs, purchased it at auction . . .

Following Dr. Howe's address at Catskill, the villagers elected a committee designated *The Committee for the Relief of the Suffering Greeks*. It was part of the nationwide effort, one of the earliest of the American humanitarian gestures to

share the nation's bounty with the less fortunate abroad. Many persons must have equated the Greek struggle with our own War of Independence; others may have seen it as a struggle between Christianity and Mohammedanism. Whatever the reasons, the Greek cause became an American one. Newspapers gave extensive coverage and numerous appeals were made for relief supplies as well as money. Greene County was determined to do its share.

Greece had long been under foreign control. In the fourth crusade, commencing in 1203, the adventurous Franks had established dukedoms at Athens and in other Greek cities. But with the fall of Constantinople (Istanbul) in 1453, it was only a few years before Greece was absorbed into the Turkish Empire. Historians report that under indifferent Turkish rule, the administration of the country sank gradually to a most miserable condition, although the spirit of freedom never entirely died out in the mountainous regions.

As the Turkish Empire began to deteriorate in the latter part of the eighteenth century, that spirit of liberty began to reassert itself and the Greeks finally broke out in armed insurrection in 1821. Turkey responded in a most barbarous manner. By 1822, after framing a provisional constitution, Greece declared its independence. The ensuing five years saw continued bloodshed, pillage and rape; the civilian population was starving. By 1827, the Greeks had won the naval support of England, France and Russia; their combined fleets defeated the Turko-Egyptian navy, and the Greek nation was established. The *Greene County Republican* in its post-holiday issue of December 26, 1827 noted:

The news of the destruction of the Turkish fleet seems to have given great satisfaction throughout the country. The citizens of New Haven illuminated that city on Wednesday evening and the extensive range of college buildings [Yale] displayed their lights in each window in the form of Crosses.

Catskill's *Committee for the Relief of the Suffering Greeks* consisted of sixteen men who were committed to promoting the Greek cause. They met at Mackey Crosswell's hotel on April 8, 1828 with the Reverend Doctor Porter in the chair. Hiland Hill Jr. was designated as secretary. Two resolutions were passed that evening:

Resolved — that it be recommended to the different religious societies of this town, to make contributions in their respective churches, at such time as may be proposed by their Clergymen. Resolved — that Majors Hawley and Porter be a committee to receive provisions and clothing from the inhabitants of the county of Greene and that Major Hawley be the treasurer to receive the money contributed.

(continued on page 5)

## GREEK CAUSE (continued from page 4)

Dr. Porter's committee then authorized the printing and distribution of a small broadside to publicize the Greek cause. A surviving copy of this handbill is in the Greene County Historical Society's archival material at Bronck Museum. It reads:

Catskill, April 7, 1828

SIR,

At a Public meeting held in this village on Saturday 1st, we were appointed a Committee, to solicit donations for the relief of the suffering Greeks. At that Meeting, Doct. Howe, who recently returned from Greece, was present, and made some representations derived from personal observation, of the condition of that people.

Prepared as we were, to hear of privation of distress and misery, the testimony of this eye-witness went far beyond all that we had apprehended. Engaged in a war with a powerful and ferocious foe; their fields laid waste; their habitations burned; their wives and children driven to the caves of the mountains and to the beach — the sons of Greece have lost all they once possessed, but the inextinguishable determination, to cast off the chain of tyranny, and the hope of final triumph.

Naked, starving and dying, the women and children of that once happy land, cry to us for food to sustain life, and for clothing to cover their nakedness. They have already tasted of American bounty; and in the language of one who went there to distribute that bounty, when an American sail is discovered approaching the shore, the eye of the starving kindles with hope, and the emaciated children clap their hands and cry, "The Americans are coming and we shall have bread."

To alleviate their distresses, dire beyond parallel, the Christians of every village and town and city in our country, are called upon to contribute from the fulness which GOD has blessed them. Shall this appeal be made in vain?

A Committee has been organized in the city of New-York, who will take in charge all the donations, and make arrangements, as soon as practicable, to ship Provisions and Clothing for Greece. Contributions of *Money, Clothing, Grain, Beans, Peas and Salted Provisions* will be received by Henry M'Kinstry, Ezra Hawley and Addison Porter, and forwarded to that Committee. We would earnestly solicit the attention of the inhabitants of your town to this subject; and we trust, immediate efforts will be made by you to aid in this cause of benevolence.

Then followed the names of David Porter, Joseph Prentiss, Isaac N. Wyckoff, Jacob Haight, Orrin Day, John Adams, Addison Porter, Henry M'Kinstry, James Powers, Robert Dorlon, Francis Sayre, Jacob Van Orden, Ezra Hawley, Hiland Hill Jr., Amos Cornwall and William Van Bergen.

The local newspapers continued to press support for the Greek cause. In its May 21, 1828 issue, the *Republican* comments:

Intelligence has been received at Ancona that all the Greek ships of War and merchantmen, had, with the permission of the government, hoisted their national flag on the 18th, a proof that the new government of Greece is considered as likely to be consolidated, and that England recognizes its independence.

Ongoing research has not yet revealed the exact value of support raised in Greene County but indications are that it was substantial for the times. On July 9, 1828, that same newspaper could report that the New-York Greek Committee had acknowledged the receipt of \$3,690.64 from several sources. They were preparing to stock another ship for Greece, to sail at the latter part of the month, or sooner, if sufficient contributions were to come in to make up a cargo.

Greene County residents were urged to read Dr. Howe's newly published volume *Historical Sketch of the Greek Revolution*; readers were informed that its 459 pages included a last chapter on the naval battle of Navarino.

The Greek cause for independence, for a period of time, touched the hearts and minds of Americans. Greene County played its part. One surviving diary, that of Abner Austin of Jefferson Heights, carries a notation that he had made his contribution in money toward the Greek cause. The Greek Appeal was a phase of local history tied to the larger scene of world events.

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## "BITS AND PIECES" FROM THE CATSKILL MESSENGER

January 23, 1847: The proprietors of the People's Line have disposed of all of their boats as follows: The steamboat *North America* was sold for \$35,000, — purchaser, James Raymond; the *Rochester* for \$35,000, same purchaser; the *South America* for \$50,000 — Seth Kelly, purchaser; the *Columbia* for \$50,000 — Eli Kelley, purchaser; the *Isaac Newton, Knickerbocker*, and three-fourths of the *Hendrick Hudson* sold for \$330,000 — Elijah Peck and Isaac Newton, purchasers. Terms eleven per cent cash — balance in two, four, six, eight, ten and twelve months, with approved security.

May 22, 1847: Medway Post Office is the name of a Post Office established about half way between Coxsackie and Greenville in this county. S. C. Titus, Post-Master.

November 27, 1847: On Wednesday morning, the 17th inst., at about 2 o'clock, a fire broke out in the chair factory of Palmer & Neal, in Hunter, which destroyed the factory, a grist mill attached, four dwelling houses, two large and three small barns, and a school house . . . .

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## JAMES M. PIERSON, CIVIL WAR RECRUITER

—Raymond Beecher

*Manuscripts relating to Greene County continue to turn up in unexpected places. By a series of fortunate circumstances a major collection of Civil War documents now in the Vedder Memorial Library at Bronck Museum came from Dr. Alexander P. Leverty, II of Richmond, Virginia. Established as a memorial to his grandfather, James Malcolm Pierson (1832-1905), it was the donor's final decision to maintain the collection as a unit rather than to disperse it among several historical groups. These Pierson manuscripts, supplemented by information from the Charles G. Coffin Collection and the Van Santvoord volume **The One Hundred Twentieth Regiment**, published in 1894, are the basis for this article.*

The military career of James M. Pierson began in the decade before the Civil War when he enrolled in the New York State Militia; it ended with his discharge at Elmira on July 1, 1865, at the close of the great conflict between the northern and the southern states. He was born at Cairo on January 10, 1830, the son of William Pierson, former Greene County Clerk. In his early years James Pierson earned a livelihood as a carpenter, eventually relocating in Catskill village. In 1854 he exchanged occupations by becoming a general store clerk. Profiting from that experience, in 1860 he entered into partnership for the operation of a retail dry goods store; he sold out to his partner the following year.

By 1855 James Pierson had earned a noncommissioned officer's rating in the militia as Sergeant of Sappers and Miners (28th Regiment, 12th Brigade, 3d Division). This military appointment, signed by Colonel George W. Pratt and dated at Prattsville, October 12, 1855, is among the papers preserved. Nine months later Pierson was appointed by Colonel Pratt as Quartermaster Sergeant; nine months later he became Sergeant (Right General Guide).

After the Fort Sumter bombardment, Greene and Ulster men were quick to join a three-months regiment commanded by Colonel George W. Pratt. That group returned home after the expiration of a short term of service to reorganize as the Eightieth NY Volunteers. It left for Washington on October 25, 1861. The second regiment to enlist from Ulster and Greene Counties was the famous 120th; it left Kingston for the seat of military operations on August 24, 1862. James Pierson's Company K was of that regiment.

The 120th NY Volunteers was organized in response to the call of President Lincoln, issued July 2d, 1862, for three hundred thousand men. The national government had come to realize it would be a longer, bloodier war than first anticipated. As the

men enlisted, they repaired to Camp Samson (near Kingston) where they were duly enrolled and initiated into camp life.



Val Kriele Photo

Uriah Coffin's Civil War Field Desk — Daguerreotype of Captain Pierson and other officers — Military Commission of James M. Pierson.

Taking advantage of the offer of a captaincy to those men who raised a company at their own expense under General Orders No. 725, Adjutant General's Office, State of New York, dated July 30, 1862, James Pierson began to recruit for Company K. He travelled to Cairo, Greenville, Durham and to Windham, urging men to join the colors. An examination of the 91 individual volunteer enlistment forms retained by Captain Pierson reveals some interesting information about the Greene County men. Occupations were listed as follows: farmer 64, laborer 4, mechanic 2, cooper 1, butcher 2, clerk 2, harness maker 1, carpenter 1, blacksmith 1, miller 1, cabinet maker 1, farmer-driver 1, farm hand 1, millwright 2, furnace hand 2, paper maker 1, and boatman 1.

Although youth predominated in Captain Pierson's company, more older men were enrolled than is generally realized. Ages stated on the Volunteer Application forms were:

Ages	No.	Ages	No.
18-20	31	31-35	4
21-25	36	36-40	4
26-30	10	41-44	6

Could the intensity of their convictions to preserve the union account for the number of older men?

Of the 91 soldiers influenced to join the colors by Captain Pierson, 17 signed their volunteer papers with the traditional "X" used by those unable to read and write. The township of Greenville furnished 14 men, Durham 28, Cairo 24, Windham 22, and Ashland 3; Company K was formed and James Pierson earned his captaincy.

(continued on page 7)

## CAPTAIN PIERSON *(continued from page 6)*

After being inducted into army life at Camp Samson, final farewells were made on August 23 and early on August 24. At 8 a.m. camp was broken, the company marching to Roundout to board the steamer *Manhattan* for the trip down river to New York; it was one of several company groups to move out at the same time. At City Hall Park the men were issued muskets and some limited military supplies. That same afternoon they took the ferry to Jersey City, entraining for Philadelphia, a railroad trip which lasted until 6 a.m. the following day. In Philadelphia they were served one of the famous civilian breakfasts the citizens provided for the troops passing through. Once again the 120th entrained, moving through Baltimore without incident in a city notorious for its southern sympathizers. On August 27th, at midnight, they reached Washington, to bivouac in the streets until the next morning when they marched across the Long Bridge over the Potomac River to Arlington Heights, the estate of General Robert E. Lee. Might one suppose Private Robert Lee of Company K, Cairo, received some joshing from his fellow soldiers?

Captain Pierson later described Company K military experience. For three years he was with the Army of the Potomac – in battles of The Wilderness and before Richmond:

“Was with my command all through her marches.

Was taken sick with camp fever, dysentery and diarrhea on the march to Manassas, Bristo and Warrington Station . . . Remained on duty on the return march to Bristo where we encamped for some days. Broke camp and moved to Falmouth, Virginia, in the fall months of 1862. Very wet weather, raining nearly all the time we were on the march, lying at night in the mud. Soon after reaching Falmouth, my regiment was ordered down the Rappahannock below Fredericksburg to cut timber and lay corduroy roads, remaining there until the day of the opening of the battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862. On the morning of which we moved to Falmouth and crossed to the field of battle in the afternoon, reaching the front line of battle late in the afternoon and took up the skirmish line. On the retreat of the army we encamped on marshy ground near Falmouth where many of our camp were taken sick with typhoid fever.”

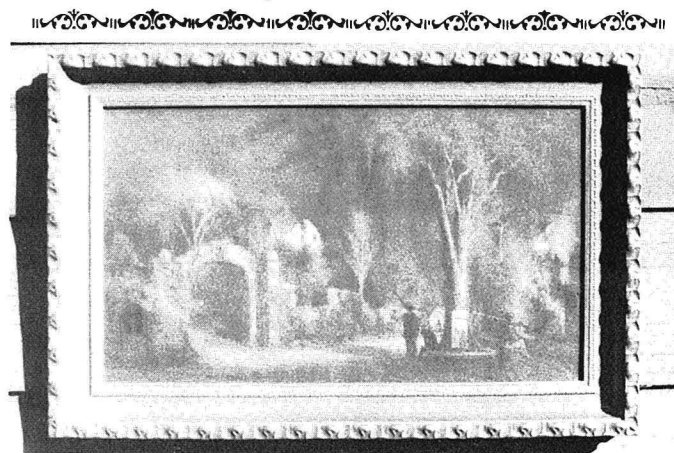
Medically incapacitated, Captain Pierson was hospitalized at Georgetown Seminary, then offered sick leave for thirty days. He returned to Cairo, Greene County, to be treated by Dr. Levi King. At the end of 30 days he again returned to Washington. Finally discharged, he came back to Cairo. This terminated Captain Pierson's connection with the 120th Regiment.

In August 1863, James Pierson received an appointment as clerk of the Board of Enrollment Headquarters, Kingston. In December 1864 he was

again in military service, receiving a commission as captain of Engineers, 15th Regiment, NY Volunteers. He joined that group at City Point, Virginia, and was given command of Company G then stationed at forts on the line of the City Point – Petersburg railroad. Company G participated in the battle of Petersburg as infantry in support of Fort Rice. On leaving Petersburg the company marched to Staunton River and worked at bridge building at Roanoke. Eventually they moved across country to Richmond and from there to Washington, D.C., marching the entire distance. The 15th Regiment was mustered out and finally discharged on July 1, 1865 at Elmira, New York. Captain Pierson returned to the Hudson Valley a few days later.



James M. Pierson



Civil War in Virginia  
B.B.G. Stone - artist

Katharine M. Decker Memorial Collection

The *Examiner*, December 23, 1905 records the obituary of this Civil War veteran, then living at Bayonne, New Jersey. His extensive war service is mentioned as was the fact that he was forced to use crutches from a war disability. Surviving James M. Pierson was his wife, four sons and two daughters. The sons were Malcolm, James M. Jr., Joshua M. Fiero, Edward D.; the daughters were Eleanor, wife of Dr. Gordon M. Leverty of Bridgeport, Connecticut and Laura D., wife of Dr. Stephen M. Lee of Orange, New Jersey.

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## OTIS T. BEDELL (1843-1903); INVENTOR AND PARK PROMOTER

—Raymond Beecher

The *Examiner* (February 1, 1903) contained a news item taken from the *Cairo Herald*: "Word was received here last week that Otis T. Bedell died in California where he had been for the last two years. He will be buried there. Mr. Bedell was one of the best known men in this section of the country. He was the owner of Aratoga Park, that beautiful piece of property situated near South Cairo. He was an inventor and had secured a patent on a steel railroad tie. He died on January 22, 1903 at 60 years of age."

Otis T. Bedell was from an older Greene County family; the Bedells in the main resided in the Cocksackie—New Baltimore townships. Except for winters in New York City and later in California, he was to be found at his Aratoga Park residence. It was Bedell's ambition to convert his 170-acre stock farm into a nature preserve. In the latter years of the nineteenth century he had bridged the deep ravine near the Susquehanna Turnpike with a span of 32 feet so as to give him a short route to his mineral spring which was highly prized for its content of iron, sulphur and magnesia. The park also included part of Bell Brook and all of Bedell's Falls.

Public notice was given of the park's establishment in the *Examiner* for June 9, 1894:

NOTICE FOR A NEW PRIVATE PARK IN THE CATSKILLS — All persons are hereby notified that all the lands of Otis T. Bedell and Jane Bedell in the town of Cairo, County of Greene, State of New York, bounded principally on the north and east by the Susquehanna Turnpike (about one mile east of Cairo village) and on the south and west mostly by the Forge road, containing about 170 acres of both land and water, is hereby dedicated and designated for the purpose of a *Private* Park, for propagating or protecting fish, birds and game.

Otis T. Bedell

Hunters and fishermen soon saw the preserve as a potential source for sport, forcing Bedell to post numerous No Trespassing signs with a \$25 penalty for disregarding the same. In addition, he employed several local men to patrol the park. They were instructed to arrest any trespassers, earning a bounty of \$5 per head. Later that fall he would offer a reward of \$100 "in gold" for the arrest and conviction of trespassers who fished in his pond.

By 1897 the idea of using a horseless carriage on his private park roads intrigued him. He examined 17 different vehicles but reported to the *Examiner* that he found none as yet to suit his needs.

Money to finance Aratoga Park, to maintain a winter residence in California at his La Canada Ranch, and for scientific experiments came from a

series of inventions — more than 126, most of which Bedell disposed of promptly. His most famous and used patent was for a paste board compartment for eggs, a device which he sold for the modest sum of \$350. Another widely used invention for banks and schools was his simple little sponge and rubber cup — that brought \$2300. He also invented a paper maché sugar mold.

While traveling westward across the continent, he was delayed by a train wreck and immediately put his mind to the problem of railroad ties. The accident had been attributed to the spread of the rails and Bedell intended to resolve that situation. Out of his inventive mind came an improved railroad tie, of steel, being hollow, requiring no bolts or fastening, on a type of leg which anchored it securely. He rated the tie as practically indestructible and of great value in those foreign countries plagued by termites of white ants. Models of this tie were first cast at the Catskill Foundry and Machine Works.

The *Examiner* described the tie as one which could be "simply slipped in and placed against a "U" shaped groove cast for that purpose and then have a soled plate keyed in on the opposite side to hold it in position. The rail is then held by a grip stronger than that of the ordinary spike and so adjusted that it is free to accommodate itself to atmospheric conditions which lengthen or shorten the rail. The rails are connected by means of a long plate which is also keyed to the opposite side. With such rails and ties track laying and repairing could be much more rapidly done than under present circumstances, and doubtless the ties would be well nigh indestructible."

In August of 1897, this inventor started out on a business trip to promote his railroad tie and a patented rail bridge. He took space #62 at the American Institute Fair in New York to exhibit these two inventions, an effort which won him a special silver prize medal for his railroad tie.

During the last two years of his life, Otis T. Bedell remained year round in California, unable for health reasons to travel east to his Aratoga Park.

The remains of Otis T. Bedell were finally shipped east and buried on Aratoga Hill in a corner of the field west of his house.

—On Sunday evening, April 27, 1931, Jack "Legs" Diamond was shot at Aratoga Inn, formerly Otis T. Bedell's house. Did the echo of the automatic shotguns and the resulting excitement disturb Otis' long sleep? One never will know.

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## VEDDER LIBRARY NOTES

□◇A major gift of regional importance has come from Mrs. Helen Austin Behrendt of Jefferson Heights, Catskill. It consists of more than 175 bound ledgers, journals and diaries, as well as several lots of loose manuscript material. With a few exceptions it relates to the operation of the Hope Paper Mill in Austin's Glen from 1813 to its demise in the mid 1880's. The material will supply primary source information for an article on the Austin Paper Mill in the spring 1982 issue of *The Quarterly Journal*.

□◇Two paper items have come from Mrs. Edith Van Denbergh Betts of Kingston. The first is the report of the New Baltimore Mutual Insurance Association for the year 1885, addressed to Mrs. Betts' grandfather, Daniel S. Miller of Medway. The second item is the 1895 Year Leaflet for the First Reformed Church at West Coxsackie. Another relative, E. L. Van Den Berg is listed as a deacon. We are always pleased to receive such paper items to add to the contents of the vertical file.

□◇The Amherst Wilder Foundation of St. Paul, Minnesota, has sent a copy of Merrill E. Jarchow's biography of Amherst H. Wilder. This midwestern millionaire was married to Fanny Spencer at the Catskill home of her sister and brother-in-law, the S. Sherwood Days, with the Reverend G. A. Howard officiating. The volume also makes mention of the cattle ranch operated by Joshua S. Day in Montana.

□◇And in working through more of the uncatalogued Pulver—Stiefel and predecessors' gift we came across the records for the final years of the Catskill Mountain Railway. The firm's last check is included, one which reduced the receiver's checking account to zero balance.

□◇Purchases added to the Vedder Library holdings include the Haines Falls *Library Cookbook*; Polk's *Greene County Directory* of 1962; Adams's *The Hudson River, A Guidebook*; DeLap's *Mountain Laurels*; Kulman's *Reflections*; Crowley's *The Old Albany County and the American Revolution* as well as Wilcoxon's *Seventeenth Century Albany*.

□◇Mr. and Mrs. George Peters of Honey Hollow Road, Grapeville, have supplied the library with an extra copy of the *Examiner*, the 1930 Centennial Edition. The Society is making subject cards for persons, places and events mentioned therein.

□◇Acknowledgment is made of the volunteer efforts of Mrs. Marion Britt and Mrs. Elizabeth Miller in cataloging and filing during the summer season and to Miss Roberta Everitt for providing technical advice on library matters. The copier has helped increase library donations from patrons who put their contributions in the wood bucket provided by Harry Miller.

□◇For several years the Vedder Library has had on its "wanted list" Delber W. Clark's volume *The World of Justus Falckner*. Published by the Muhlenberg Press in 1946, the book relates the involvement of Justus Falckner in the establishment of Lutheranism in this country. He was the first Lutheran pastor to be ordained in this country and much of his effort was in the Hudson Valley and particularly with the Zion Lutheran Church at Athens. Mrs. June Vincent was instrumental in arranging for the gift of this publication, long out-of-print.

The Reverend Delber Wallace Clark (1889-1946) was ordained in the Episcopal Church in 1914; his last full time parish was Christ Church, Coxsackie. He also served Trinity Episcopal Church, Athens. "His scholarly interest in the very early organization of an Episcopal Church in an obviously Dutch community led him to make a study of the records of the Episcopal Church at Athens and of other local churches. There he met Justus Falckner and came so strongly under his spell that what had begun as a minor movement ended as a comprehensive study of church history and social conditions in the early eighteenth century."

Researchers, particularly genealogists, have other reasons to be appreciative of The Reverend Delber W. Clark's avocation. His voluminous local history notes, now arranged in acid-free reference boxes at the Vedder Library, receive constant use during the season.

□◇The Revolutionary period for Coxsackie District and the Great Embought is reflected in our surname cards which contain references to those persons' involvement in that struggle. Included are the names on the Revolutionary tax list of 1780, signatures on the *Coxsackie Association*, listed names on military records and names from other Revolutionary era documents. Additions are continually being made as new sources of information come to the library's attention.

□◇The Bronck family papers, a primary resource for local history research, are catalogued chronologically; a general index is badly needed. Any volunteers for the task?

□◇Dr. Thomas Thomson of Catskill Landing and his descendants, one of whom married Thomas Cole, left a number of documents which reflect Dr. Thomson's investment in land within the confines of Greene County. Now a number of these have come to the Vedder Memorial Library as part of the growing Thomson—Cole Collection, a memorial to Florence Cole Vincent. Mrs. Edith Cole Silberstein is the donor. At least two Journal articles will be forthcoming from this newly acquired material.

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**PRESIDENT KRIELE'S REPORT** (continued from page 3)

than clothing, is needed to replenish the stock. Keep a box handy in which to put surplus items which can be brought to the Trading Post in the spring. Transportation will be provided for heavier, larger donations. Leftovers from garage and lawn sales are also welcomed.

From early spring until October 1, each Tuesday sees researchers at the Vedder Library delving into handwritten and printed material, photographing items and/or requesting duplication on the dry copier. At time space is at a premium. Marion Britt gave many hours filing incoming material. The advice of Betty Miller and Roberta Everitt was sought on technical library problems. Mrs. Helen Austin Berhardt donated the Austin family papers, many of which detail the story of rag paper making in Austin's Glen from 1813 to 1885. The Library of Congress continues to express interest in such acquisitions and prepares location cards for its National Union Catalog.

"Behind the scenes" work in organizing and cataloging the collections of museum items continues. Curator Shelby Kriele works diligently on a volunteer basis three days the week to accomplish these and other tasks. She attended several meetings of museum personnel around the capital district area. Requests continue to come in to her office for loans for professionally sponsored travelling exhibits.

Mabel Parker Smith, Society Historian and Trustee Emeritus, secured competent scholars for our third Fall Lecture Series, co-sponsored by Columbia-Greene Community College. This year's topics centered on important elements of local and regional history: the Catskill Mountains, steamboating on the Hudson, and Dutch architecture. The lectures made five enjoyable and educationally profitable fall evenings.

Over the course of the year, the Society was again pleased to offer two bus tours. In the spring participants traveled to the lower Hudson Valley — to Boscobel, Lyndhurst and the John Jay Homestead. The newly renovated American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art was the destination for the second trip in mid September. These trips are handled virtually at cost and are an excellent way to travel in comfort with congenial friends.

A new feature on the Society's calendar of events this year was the walking tours. The spring Kykuit-Embought "expedition" was filled to capacity and benefitted from the knowledge of guides Barbara Van Orden and Robert Everitt. The fall saw a repeat of this event. The walking tour of Austin's Glen (from Jefferson Heights to the Thruway bridge) was also well received by the public. Arranged by Miss Helen Van Ess, the participants assembled on the front lawn of Ralph and Florence Hunter to see an exhibit of glen related items. The Hunters and Donald Rightmyer brought out photographic items from their collections. After some of those present recalled the earlier days in the glen, the group crossed the road and began the walking part. Professor McCreight and George Peters supplied commentary of a geological and botanical nature.

In the reading of the foregoing report you can readily see it has been a busy year. I want to thank each trustee, officer, member and friend who volunteered the time and the energy to make these activities possible.

The Greene County Historical Society maintains and operates a museum, a library, publishes an excellent local history journal and in addition sponsors a wide range of community-oriented educational activities. The Society does this without any annual governmental financial support. Membership dues form a significant part of the operating budget; your dues are the sole reason we can publish this *Quarterly Journal*. Please renew your membership promptly, upgrading it if you are able to do so. Each member who renews his membership helps make the Society's extensive program possible.

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