

# Greene County Historical Journal

A Publication of the Greene County Historical Society, Inc.

U. S. Route 9-W

Coxsackie, N. Y. 12051

Vol. 6, Issue 4

★

Winter, 1982

## A CATSKILL MOUNTAIN TRAGEDY

—George H. Peiffer

Resting snugly on a shelf in the base of a mountain, overlooking Twilight Park, Haines Falls, N. Y., was a sprawling gabled, wooden structure appearing somewhat like an oversized Swiss chalet. Its huge dimensions could, at that time, easily take up two short city blocks, but it was not always so. Known half a century earlier as the Twilight Rest, an exclusive country club, it had grown by the addition of an annex, as well as wings to the right and left, until, finally, about the year 1890, it became a luxurious resort hotel, three stories high, not counting the gabled attics, with a capacity for more than 200 guests. Running lengthwise from wing to wing, on the second and third floors, were wide, well kept, carpeted hallways, indented at regular intervals with guest room and lavatory doors and partitioned in three places with fire doors. Both the right and left wings had narrower halls leading aft at right angles to the guest hallways, clean but unadorned, along which were situated the living quarters of the help. The ground floor contained the hotel offices, spacious parlors, dining rooms, kitchen and pantry. The entrance was approached by a narrow dirt road sloping downward and forming an arc, both ends intersecting the main gravel road and encompassing a grassy knoll divided by a flagstone path. From the desk in the lobby, a broad, carpeted staircase led up to the floors above. Yet, for all its elegance, when viewed from a distance this fashionable hotel had a brooding, almost melancholy aura about it, the dark brown exterior contrasting sharply with the cheerful mountain green and more brightly colored homes and boarding houses on the mountainside.

It was to this hotel, the Twilight Inn, that my Aunt Helen and I came on Thursday, July 8, 1926, not as guests but as employees. For some years now, because of my bronchial condition, she had been taking me to the Catskills, for in those days before antibiotics, the clean, fresh mountain air of this region was the only medicine. Isabel Carmen Smith, the hotel manager, hired her as a chambermaid and me as a juvenile jack-of-all-trades to shine the brass, sweep the floors and assist the guests. I was 10 years old; my aunt, 45.

We were assigned a room on the third floor, down a narrow corridor, in the rear portion of the right wing. The bathroom was about 30 feet away, toward the front of the hotel, in the same corridor just before it joined at right angles with the main hallway for that floor. The room was small but comfortable, with twin beds, a bureau, and washstand with its



Views of Twilight Inn

(continued on page 32)

## A CATSKILL MOUNTAIN TRAGEDY

*(continued from page 31)*

pitcher and basin. For the next few days we became acclimated to our new surroundings and accomplished our appointed tasks. The weekend came and went uneventfully. There were some showers and rain on Monday and Tuesday, July 12 and 13, as I recall, and some fog. Most of the help were looking forward to the party and dance to be held Tuesday night, July 13. Aunt Helen, however, was not interested in parties, and I was too young to go. And so, when the evening came, as the other employees headed for the festivities, we went to our third floor room and, after our night prayers, retired about 9 p. m.

At approximately 1 a. m., I awakened, the promptings of nature urging me to the bathroom. Half asleep, I pulled on the room light, thus awakening Aunt Helen, and went along the dimly lighted corridor to the lavatory three or four doors away. Returning to our room a few minutes later, I did not sense anything amiss and went back to bed. I was dozing back to sleep when my aunt heard loud voices and the sound of people running about in the hallway. Thinking that the servants' party had broken up and that some of them were carrying their merriment a little too far, she went out to quiet them down. The light in our bedroom was still on but I had gone back to sleep. The next thing I remember was my aunt yanking me out of bed by the arm, exclaiming that the place was on fire and we had to get out. For when she had gone into the hallway, she had found it filling with smoke, and the servants, far from indulging in any extracurricular fun, were running about in a state of panic looking for some means of escape. Without another word, she promptly dragged me after her in my comatose state from the relative security of the lighted bedroom. The lights in the corridor had failed as we groped our way through ever thickening smoke toward the staircase which lay just beyond, where this narrow corridor joined the main hall. How well I remember staggering into the surging fumes of burning pine — penetrating, sickening, suffocating — as we reached this juncture! Nor will I ever forget the roar of the flames, yet unseen, within the walls to the right and left. The sound was like that of a thundering express train, or the fury of a hurricane, on either side. Strangely, as we crossed the main hallway, I noticed a light still burning at the far end, and it seemed free of smoke in contrast to the corridor along which we had come. I tried to pull away from my aunt to go in that direction, but she held me tight and, luckily, restrained me as we moved to the staircase on the other side. When we reached the stairway, where a red exit light burned, we found other people standing on the steps in the darkness and smoke. My aunt quickly led me through them, down to a landing between the floors, where there was a window. At this point, a man came running from in back of us, opened the window and jumped out. As we edged

toward the open window, we could see several people in the lower section of the staircase down in front of us — just waiting for death — slumped on one another. Upon reaching the window, my aunt leaned out and shouted to people standing below. I don't recall her exact words, but she told them of the danger we were in and pleaded for help. They, in turn, shouted back that they couldn't help us; the building was on fire on the outside, too, and they couldn't get a ladder up. They told her she must jump or go to the roof. With that, she lifted me to the windowsill, my face toward hers, and lovingly holding both my hands in hers, let me down gradually, suspending me between the floors on the outside. She tenderly whispered into my ear that I must say an act of contrition to God (which I did), and holding me briefly in that suspended position, let go. After falling through space, I landed, sitting, on a grassy slope which faced the burning hotel. No sooner had I touched the ground than two strong men lifted me by feet and shoulders and swiftly carried me up the slope, out of danger. Getting my bearings, I stood up and found myself in a crowd of bewildered people standing about in smoke-stained nightclothes, some with smudged faces, all staring wildly, unbelievably, at the holocaust that was going on right in front of their eyes.

I stood there drinking in the awesome sight. Never in my young life had I seen anything like it! Great flames darted out the hotel's main entrance, the very exit which I, choking with smoke and restrained by my aunt, had sought to use but a minute or so earlier. Suddenly I was seized with fear. Where was Aunt Helen? Had she not jumped herself after dropping me out of the window? Could it be that she was still trapped in that inferno? Gripped with panic and a sense of impending loss, I moved about among the sea of strange faces, searching for hers. But not for long. It was she who found me as she stumbled up the hill toward me. Greatly relieved, I ran into her arms, and for a time we just stood there, grateful to be alive.

By now, the crowd was slowly moving up the grassy hill to the main road, away from the flames, as more and more of the hotel became involved. Little fires were breaking out here and there along the length of the outer structure, while the windows in other places were glowing orange with the flames raging from within. Horrible shrieks and screams pierced the night, as trapped victims plunged through flame-eaten floors to the hell below. Aunt Helen and I prayed aloud for the dying.

Fire engines were parked along the roadside, seemingly unable to cope. They did not appear to be stretching hoses or to be doing anything to put the fire out. Firemen were helping with rescue and directing survivors along the road toward the Village of Haines Falls, to other shelters and homes where they might find refuge.

*(continued on page 33)*

## A CATSKILL MOUNTAIN TRAGEDY

(continued from page 32)

It was now about 1:30 a. m. Wednesday, July 14, a full half-hour since we had learned of the fire. Bare-footed, led by rescuers, we trudged with other survivors along the gravelly country road away from the scene, toward a cottage just ahead (it could have been the Inn's annex) whose lights glimmered in the darkness through the pine trees. It was my misfortune to scrape the sole of my foot during this exercise, and for the rest of the walk I limped painfully. Along the way, I noticed that my aunt was also limping, but for a different reason. She had exited from the hotel by falling over backward, thus landing on her back and straining it.

Not all of us got into the cottage. Some were picked up by automobile and driven to refuges elsewhere in the vicinity. Aunt Helen and I, along with some twenty others, entered the cottage's downstairs rooms. We were given places on sofas and chairs, and someone very kindly offered us warm food and drink. My aunt lay back on one of the easy chairs; I knelt on one side of a sofa looking in the direction of the fire.

It soon became evident that this cottage was not to be a haven for long. For, driven by a strong easterly breeze, blazing cinders from the burning hotel were flying toward us like firecrackers on the 4th of July and alighting on the cottage roof. The firemen ordered everyone out, and we were herded into cars and station wagons for relocation to a safer place. My aunt and I were taken to The Vista located on the eastern end of the village where cots were set up in the spacious parlor. From the parlor window we could look out over the meadow and Mountain Golf Club golf course (owned by Twilight Park, founded 1899) and view the appalling sight of giant flames leaping defiantly to the heavens, their images reflected back from clouds which were now beginning to pour rain. Only the skeleton of the building, consisting of three chimneys and fireplaces remained. It was 3 a. m.

We were extended the hospitality of The Vista management until mid-morning of the same day when we were taken by car to the Red Cross office in Tannersville. There we were outfitted with new clothes to compensate for those lost in the fire, and then transported to a field hospital just outside Tannersville where Aunt Helen underwent a week's treatment for her back injury. Finally, we were sent to a local boarding house for a week of further convalescence and then entrained for home. In November of that year we were further compensated by the company that insured the hotel for property destroyed in the fire.

So sensational was this disaster that newspapers all over the country carried accounts of it, detailing the grim statistics. Forty-eight guests and 30 employees were in the building at the time. Of these, 35 escaped unscratched, 21 were injured and 22 died. Of the latter 14 were burned beyond recognition and

buried in a common grave in Haines Falls cemetery. A monument perpetuates the names of all those interred together there. Among them is the name Carl Stryker, the heroic watchman who repeatedly risked and finally lost his life returning to the stricken building to knock on doors and rouse people to their peril.

It came to light that the Twilight Inn had had several fires before last, fatal one, and that there were wooden fire escapes in the rear. Yet few, if any, guests or employees knew of them, and no fire drill was ever conducted.

The tragedy was augmented by another factor that, strangely enough, was not reported by any newspaper, but which I recall hearing about immediately after it. There were two entrances from highway 23A by which the burning hotel could be reached — one on the east, directly through Twilight Park; the other on the west, through Sunset Park. The firemen from Tannersville, 2 miles west of Haines Falls arrived first and elected to use the direct, though more distant, east entrance, since it was closer to the fire. But after leaving 23A and starting up the gravel side road, they were unable to cross a bridge that was under construction. The road was too narrow to turn the engine around, and so they had to back out again onto 23A, backtrack westward ½ mile to the Sunset Park entrance and proceed over that road to the stricken hotel. Much time that could have been employed in rescue work was lost because of this detour.

Undoubtedly, the Twilight Inn disaster is the most tragic hotel fire ever to have happened in the Catskill region. There was an investigation, of course, and I believe it resulted in better safety regulations for buildings of this type. In that respect, the Twilight Inn has something in common with other sensational disasters — the Titanic, the General Slocum, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, etc. — for it awakened people to the need to do everything possible to safeguard the most precious of all human possessions, a person's life.

*George H. Peiffer wishes to express his thanks to County Historian Mabel P. Smith and to Charles Swain, the Minority County Historian who directed him to her. In particular he wants to express appreciation to Mrs. Justine Hommel "for the very great kindness she extended to us on our visit to her, and for making available all the material she had on hand and for driving us to the site where the Twilight Inn once stood."*

□□□□□□

The Greene County Historical Society is almost unique in operating its facilities and programs with a minimum of salaried employees. I commend the volunteers who give countless hours each year and express the appreciation of all the officers and the members of the Board of Trustees.

Valentine Kriele, III (President)

## STANTON HILL IN THE 1870's — THE MOSES BEDELL DIARIES (Part 2)

—Frances Dietz &  
Raymond Beecher

*As promised in the Fall Issue of the Journal, additional vignettes describing the way of life on Stanton Hill in the late 1870's and early 80's appear here. The diaries of Moses Bedell for that period provide an excellent picture of the joys and sorrows, social activities and religious concerns of the hill farmers and their families in New Baltimore. The generosity of Mr. Walter Burke, Jr. of Fort Myers, Florida, in sharing his great-grandfather's account of his day-to-day life has made it possible to publish this series, thus preserving local history that would have otherwise been lost to succeeding generations.*

*The authors are also grateful to those who have aided in fleshing out Moses Bedell's entries by sharing their personal recollections, research, or family records: Frank Crandell, George and Alice Peters, Jane Bedell Carr, June Rose Bedell Vincent, Mr. and Mrs. Clinton Kellam and Miss Mary and Mr. Roy Kellam, Helen Finke Waddington, Edythe Garrett Cole, Elizabeth Baldwin Court, James and Clifton Baldwin and Edwin Bedell.*

BANKING SERVICES for Stanton Hill residents required traveling to Albany or Coxsackie. But some informal banking services were available from the more affluent members of the community. Both a "borrower and a lender" was a label which fitted Moses Bedell. His capital of several thousand dollars was invested in mortgages and promissory notes. After Edward Garrett's death, he also handled that estate's financial affairs. From several miles' distance men came to borrow funds of Moses. At times he did not have the money to lend, being short of cash flow income himself. A good credit reputation had been earned and Moses found it relatively easy to borrow when he needed to finance the purchase of the Jacob Bedell farm adjacent to his homestead.

The diaries reflect several years' entries of this debtor-creditor relationship, some involving real estate financing.

February 1, 1875: Talked to S. C. Carman about selling his farm. He asked \$10,000.

March 23, 1875: [At Albany] Drew my money out of the bank \$3600.

March 24, 1875: Mary Jane [Gurney] and I went to New Baltimore, called on Esq. Crandell. Mary Jane acknowledged release of a mortgage.

February 28, 1876: George E. Coonley's farm was sold today at Coxsackie at mortgage for \$4,365.

The responsibility for settling Edward Garrett's estate fell on Moses' shoulders. On December 17, 1876 he was at his sister's house (Mrs. Maria Bedell Garrett) looking over his brother-in-law's notes

and other papers. Moses took his copy of the will to show to Edward's father as the latter had not seen it. A few days later he had Ephraim Van Slyke and Jeremiah Dean appraise the personal property — they arrived at a figure of \$6,243. The two appraisers earned a fee of \$1.20.

Before the end of the year Francis DeFrate and son John called "looking to borrow money." Shortly after the new year Edwin R. Thorn paid Moses \$50 "that Frank had borrowed of me to go to Kansas with."

Cheaper land in the southern and western states interested Moses; in February 1877 he was considering buying land in Texas. Lots were cheap and payment allowed for free passage there and back on the railroads. But instead of Texas he eventually purchased in Florida.

Periodically Moses would take time out to bring his financial records up-to-date as happened on March 21, 1879 when he "sat in the house nearly all day and have been figuring and looking over my accounts with different ones."

The purchase of Jacob Bedell's farm was a cautious affair. Moses first searched out the title at Catskill, finding \$6,000 in claims against it. On May 16, 1881, he drove to Coxsackie to the Eagle Hotel where J. Brunk [Bronk] was auctioning off the New Baltimore acreage. Moses won the bidding at \$6,700 — 10% cash and the balance in 10 days. During the next week he was out borrowing money, his credit reputation serving him in good stead. One thousand dollars came from "Uncle Henry at 5½%." He gave a \$2,500 mortgage to Miss Scott through Esquire Cornelius Vanderzee, a Coeymans Town Justice in Aquetuck. The rest of the needed sum was acquired from miscellaneous sources.

DEATHS AND BURIALS were a community affair. It was the neighbourly thing to do to help out, hauling in the coffin from a local furniture merchant and undertaker, helping to dig the grave, transporting the mourners, feeding the company and subsequently assisting to bring in the tombstone and erect it in a rural cemetery or the family plot at the home. Funeral parlors as we know them today did not exist.

Funeral services were held at home unless it was inconvenient to do so, in which case they were held at the church with which the deceased was affiliated.

Writing about death had a great poignancy for Moses as he began his entries in his 1875 diary; his 24-yr.-old wife, nee' Sarah Powell, had died only two months previously. Public vital records for 1874 indicate she died of "an abscess." A letter written at that time to relatives by her brother Arthur Powell recounts a sorrowful train of events culminating in a kitchen-table operation for a burst appendix which had no chance of success.

(continued on page 35)

## STANTON HILL — BEDELL DIARIES

(continued from page 34)

We do not know who preached her funeral service, but on January 6, 1875 Moses "Paid F. H. Simmons for undertakers service and coffin \$85.00." Only 12 days later Moses' next door neighbor's wife, Catharine Garrett Powell, died suddenly. The next day he "called at Smith Powell's to help them. Went to Cocksackie to tell Peter Garrett and others of the sad news." On the 20th of January, "Catharine was buried. Took out my bob sleighs and put them together. I carried the bearers to the yard. Mr. Inglesby preached."

February 6, 1875: Garrison Palmer's boy Eddie was buried today. There were 7 deaths recorded in the Coeymans Herald this week. Mr. Briggs' daughter at Stephenville [Alcove] is also buried today. Death is on every side. There is no age exempt from the grave. February 7, 1875: Roads very icy. Two funerals today. One at the Corners [Medway] and the other at Sodom [corner of today's Sodom Road and Shady Lane] — Spencer's child at the former. Burlingham at the latter. Very cold yet. Father went to Sodom.

April 14, 1875: Went to Coeymans Cemetery to look at some monuments.

April 26: Mr. Leigh came here this morning and I went to the burying ground [Stanton Hill Cemetery] with him to see about getting a monument for Sarah to mark the spot where the earthly remains of the dear one rests.

May 17: Mr. Mead has been here to see about selling me a monument.

On July 3 and 4 while on a trip to Albany, Schenectady, and to the Shaker village at Hancock, Moses ordered Sarah's monument.

July 4: Engaged Dick Roberts to bring my monument home when it is done.

September 1: Father going to Mossy Hill [quarry southwest of Alcove] to order a stone to set the monument on.

September 12: We all went to the burying ground to visit the graves of the departed loved ones who have gone to that shore from whence no traveler returns.

September 17: Dug and fixed the foundation for the monument.

September 25: Roberts got here with the monument about noon. After dinner I got Abram [Tuttle] and Willie [Possons] to help unload it. Paid \$15.00 for having the monument brot over.

September 27: Mr. Fuller came and set up the monument. Smith [Powell], George [Coonley], Pat [McGuigan], and Abram helped.

The monument — a graceful obelisk — stands today as a fitting memorial in the Bedell plot in the Stanton Hill cemetery.

One Sunday in late October Moses wrote that Sarah's brother Arthur Powell, and his own brother Smith Bedell and his wife Elvena had visited at the homestead after which "we all went to the burying ground." That year after having had Christmas dinner at his brother Smith's in Cocksackie, Moses wrote

"The thought comes to my mind: Will we ever all meet again at another Christmas and which one will be taken from the number?"

January 18, 1876: Millie Thorn died this morning. We brought the box to the burying ground.

January 19, 1876: We went to the burying ground and helped him [Ben Garrett] commence the grave for Millie Thorn.

June 1, 1876: John Gurney brought up Aunt Phebe's stone — we put it up.

June 10, 1876: Went to Grapeville and settled with Peter Hart for interest on mortgage — took some vendue notes and \$3 cash. Stopped at the corners [Medway] and brought the coffin back for George E. Coonley to the burying ground.

May 9, 1877: Father took Lydia Garrett and Charlotte to the Corners to pick out a coffin and shroud for Estelle [Bedell]. They have changed the funeral instead of having it at the Corners they have it at their house.

May 10, 1877: Ben dug the grave. Estelle is mortifying [decaying] very much.

May 11, 1877: Father, Mary Jane, Clara and I went to Alberts to the funeral. There was a large gathering. Warren Hathaway preached. Sanford Bull of Coeymans decked the coffin with flowers which was very nice.

Estelle Bedell had died of consumption at the age of 21. She was the daughter of Albert, Moses' oldest brother, and Caroline Garrett Bedell. Their farm home is labeled "Bedell Hall" on Beers' 1867 map and is the present Robert VanEtten place on Sawmill Road in the Town of New Baltimore.

Once or twice a year the family and visiting relatives would take a walk to the Stanton Hill burying ground. In such cemeteries the grass was cut no more than twice a year. Burials by custom were the responsibility of the relatives and friends who actually brought the deceased in his coffin to the family plot and buried the same.

The death of Edward Garrett, married to Moses Bedell's only sister, Maria, was a shock to the entire community. Much of the responsibility for the funeral fell on Moses' shoulders:

July 1, 1876: Edward died about 11:20 o'clock this morning. I called there twice and went to South Westerlo to tell Absolom Seaman. Alvira came out with me. Father and Jacob [Moses's next eldest brother] went to Medway to make arrangements about the coffin and grave. A. A. Palmer came and got some ice to put around Edward [to keep the body from decaying too rapidly in hot weather].

Later that month when the grave digger Coonie asked for eight dollars for that work, Moses noted: "I told him it was too mutch (*sic*)."

Accidents causing death were also part of the story. A lad working the machinery of Henry P. Miller's cider mill got his head caught and crushed. The funeral followed the next day.

MEDICAL PROBLEMS first called for home remedies whether for human beings or for the live-

(continued on page 36)

STANTON HILL – BEDELL DIARIES

*(continued from page 35)*



Moses Bedell  
(1843 - 1912)



Sarah Emily Powell Bedell  
(1850 - 1874)  
1st Wife of Moses Bedell



Emma Crane Bedell  
(1855-1934)  
2nd Wife of Moses Bedell



**Joseph Bedell (1803 - 1882)**



**Sarah Ann Smith Bedell (1804 - 1866)**

**Parents of Moses Bedell**



**Clara May (1871 - 1935)**



**Ada (1873 - 1944)**

**Children of Moses and Sarah Bedell**

*(continued on page 38)*

## STANTON HILL — BEDELL DIARIES

*(continued from page 37)*

stock. A doctor was summoned only in the most serious situations when death was a distinct possibility. Every nineteenth century farm family had written recipes to treat colds, fevers, lockjaw, etc. Instead of being in the cookbook, Moses' family could consult his diaries.

The cough syrup used by the Bedells called for an ounce each of flaxseed, stick of licorice, slippery elm and thoroughwort. It was simmered in one pint of water and eventually strained. To the liquid one pint of molasses was added and a half pound of loaf sugar. The second simmering required twenty minutes.

The remedy for lockjaw was simpler — it only required the pouring of spirits of turpentine over the wounds, cut or bruises. "It is also good for croup. [Use a] white flannel and cover the throat."

To cure a felon "use one ounce of dried Lobelia to ½ pint each of alcohol and soft water." Steeping was required, the longer the better. When ready a soft cloth was saturated and wrapped around the felon or gathering.

"To remove moth patches [skin blemishes?] use one tablespoon of sulphur or lac sulphur ground to one pint of rum and apply once a day."

Quaker Bitters was an accepted remedy for a variety of complaints. On a March day in 1875 Moses drove to John Halsted's and purchased four bottles of this tonic for \$3.00; he later sold one bottle to Mr. Coonley for 75 cents, the cost price. Since the Bedells were of the Quaker faith, the name Quaker Bitters may have had special appeal.

Tea "for the blood" was made from tag alder, a supply being available in the Bedell woodlot. If it did not "set up" the drinker, he could gather some boneset for another home brew.

Dental work was generally performed at home if it meant pulling a bothersome tooth, the bleeding being stopped by packing the gum cavity with rag weed. Serious dental surgery took the Bedells to Cossackie; Joseph Bedell made one such errand in July 1876.

Not only did Moses follow the family tradition of brewing medicinal teas, etc. for their own use, but he also tried farm made remedies for the livestock. In October 1877 he was busy boiling prickly ash, spice-wood, wild cherry and tag alder "for the horses."

POLITICS interested Moses Bedell although he did not hold any major political office in Greene County, being satisfied to serve more locally on the school district board and as an assessor.

Town meetings were a yearly occurrence or more frequent if the need arose. A large turnout was noted at the one held at Henry Miller's on April 6, 1875. While there Moses signed a release form for land involving a strip south of the Winn farm.

The Democrat party generally held its local caucuses at John Vincent's place. Moses attended as a member of that party and was persuaded in 1879 to

run for assessor in place of Smith Powell. His Quaker heritage did not prevent him from taking the oath of office when elected. Thereafter he was busy reviewing the assessment roll with Judson Wicks and Jacob B. Gurney, arranging for the posting of assessors' notices around the township. After hearing one complaint from Ed. Van Orden, the books were closed, sworn to at Edgar Halstead's and were delivered to Town Supervisor Losee at Grapeville.

In October 1879 Moses was meeting with the Supervisor and Assessors of the township to sign the nine election notices which were to be posted in public gathering places. Moses noted he posted one at Jerry Dean's mill.

The national election of 1876 brought out substantial political activity. On August 25, 1876 C. M. Powell left a rope and flag pole to be erected at Jacob Bedell's for the Tilden — Hendricks campaign. The following day Moses was to be found assisting other men with the raising: "there was a good many there — speeches from Trego & Judson."

Near election time (November 1, 1876) Moses took a load of relatives and friends to the hamlet to the Democrat lecture and torchlight procession. The main speaker was Eugene Raymond; others made shorter addresses. It was near midnight when the Bedell party got back to Stanton Hill.

Moses saw the November 3rd evening Republican lecture as a place to demonstrate his agency's fire extinguisher but the lateness of the program prevented that piece of publicity.

On election day itself, Moses and William Harden went to vote — Moses favored Tilden. While there he also signed papers attempting to prohibit the County from raising money for a new road in the township running from New Baltimore hamlet to Medway four corners.

One interesting diary entry made on May 9, 1879 makes brief mention of the shooting of a deputy sheriff out at Berne, Albany County, by antirenters. This incident was long after the antirent war outbreak and indicates the strength of that local feeling in the hill towns of Albany County.

On the local level, Moses and many of his fellow townsmen were of the Anti-Road persuasion. Both Road and Anti-Road candidates were nominated at caucuses at Reuben Vincent's public house in March of 1877 just before the April 3rd annual Town Meeting. At stake was not the new New Baltimore-to-Medway road which had already been constructed and was probably desirable for all concerned, but the method of financing it. It seems that the Greene County Board of Supervisors wanted to borrow on the credit of the Town of New Baltimore to pay for the new highway. So those who opposed this plan called themselves Anti-Road. Moses reported a large turnout for voting. The next day he wrote "The road ticket elected only one man by above 50. Some of our men (Garrison Palmer, Commissioner) got 1 majority. Supervisor Augustus Sherman 115,



## EDUCATION IN NORTON HILL

—Raymond Beecher

Within the lifetime of many of this Journal's readers, the one-room schoolhouse has completely disappeared, giving way to complex central school districts. Eight grades in one room with a single teacher was long the norm, although one questions the quality of such educational instruction. In later years some schools like the Greenville Free Academy were considered very progressive in that the grades were divided into three units. This writer recalls the long recitation bench for the grades four through six in the south wing of the educational facility. When the higher grades were up front on the bench being instructed, lower grade students had the opportunity of "listening in." When the teacher was absent for a day, it was not unusual to have one of the more advanced sixth graders provide substitute instruction.

A number of Trustees' Minute Books containing "bare bones" records of one-room schoolhouses have survived the destruction of outdated material. And among these are two volumes for School District No. 1, Towns of Greenville and Durham; that schoolhouse was located in the hamlet of Norton Hill.

The opening entry in the earlier volume is for the year 1852. Thereafter, until its absorption into the Greenville Central Rural School system in 1929, the various trustees of District #1 recorded the income and the expenses of this Norton Hill school. Some trustees did a better recording job than others; the spelling has great variety. The trustees in 1852 were J. P. Hallock, Luther B. Eaton and Ezra Burroughs. Except for the teacher's salary, they had to approve expenditures for the year amounting to \$6.47. This provided a new stove at \$5.00 less \$1.28 trade-in allowance, a blank notebook for \$.25, repairs to the building which cost \$2.00, paying for the fall cleaning of the school at \$1.00, 3 pieces of wallpaper for \$.25 and a lock and hasp for another quarter.

On January 1, 1852 money coming in from that section of the Greenville township amounted to \$14.52 and from that section of Durham amounting to \$2.70. For many years this school operated on a budget of less than \$100 the year; it would pay for both repairs and supplies. Each year someone was paid one dollar to clean the educational facility; Mrs. Abrams did it in 1852.

Wood provided the fuel until in later years when coal was hauled in from either Coxsackie or Ravena by the Ingalls teamsters. R. P. Gordon, John Showers, John L. Sarles, L. Hickok, David Hickok and Smith Southard sold wood to the district. Cutters and splitters who earned a little cash money included G. Simpkins, A. DeFrate and Miller Abrams.

Repairs to the old building included frequent replacement of panes of glass and mortar work by

(continued on page 40)

## VEDDER LIBRARY NOTES

□◇ A helpful exchange of duplicated material with Madeline Fidell Beaufort, Paris, France relating to Benjamin B. G. Stone, the Catskill artist, has increased our knowledge of Stone's earlier adult friendships with men in the art world. We now have copies of five letters Stone wrote to Avery, the wood engraver and illustrator; they date from 1858-1860 and were written from Catskill and from Boston. Cooperative research on Stone is being undertaken.

□◇ The Charles C. Bloom Memorial Collection has been established by his granddaughter, Mrs. Viola Tepe of Dix Hills. The first gift consists of some Catskill scenic photographs. Charles C. Bloom was a direct descendant of Jacob Smith Bloom of Kiskatom.

□◇ Two Bibles with Hallenbeck genealogical information have come from Mrs. Ruth Ogden of Kinderhook. The volumes were given in memory of her grandmother, Mary E. Sutherland of New Baltimore. Mrs. Ogden also supplied copies of entries in a Sutherland Bible.

□◇ Mrs. Doris Manzer of Westminster, Maryland, has been working on the Civil War soldier, David Manzer of Prattsville. We appreciate the extensive genealogical information supplied to us; a folder has been set up for that surname and a military card for David.

□◇ A large photograph of Meadow Ridge Farm, the summer residence of the Adams — Grosbeck family which burned this past season, is now in our photographic file, courtesy of Ellen Whitbeck and Frances Adams.

□◇ Mrs. F. J. McHugh of Catskill was kind enough to provide the library with a copy of "Inscriptions from the Asbury Cemetery." And in a similar manner Gary G. Webber of Lacon, Illinois provided the library with a listing of cemetery inscriptions of Webbers buried in that section of the western part of the township of Coxsackie.

□◇ Good volunteer help is always appreciated. We missed Mrs. Britt who had been recovering from a debilitating late spring cold. Betty Miller has been most helpful in improving the usability of the card catalogue file, subject section.

□◇ The two-volume biography, *Memoirs of Joseph John Gurney*, the great Quaker leader, and dating from 1854, has come from Mildred Gurney Barnwell of Columbia County.

□◇ The National Association of the Van Valkenburg Family, Inc., will publish Volume III of *The Van Valkenburg Family in America: Tales, Stories, and Anecdotes*. All Van Valkenburgs, and persons related to VV's are invited to send anecdotes, stories, and tales about the Van Valkenburgs to the Editor of Volume III, Dr. Fred R. Van Valkenburg, 2332 Elm Street, Billings, Mont. 59102. Please do not send biographical or autobiographical resumé's. All correspondence will be acknowledged.

□□□□□□

**EDUCATION IN NORTON HILL**

*(continued from page 39)*

such men as Charles Craw, A. Norton and Platt Barker. Equipment at the school was meager. The blackboard was replaced by Harvey Stone in the 1850's at a cost of \$3.50; it was actually a board painted black. A teacher's desk was "home built" by David Griffen who billed the district \$3.75.

New York State provided limited funds from its literature appropriation to enable district libraries to purchase books. The first titles known to have been purchased in 1852 were two volumes at a cost of \$4.75 – The History of the World.

Year after year, through the decades of the 1850's and 1860's, the record book reveals normal repairs, money spent for equipment and supplies. The traditional tin cup and tin dipper, as well as the tin pail for drinking water, were replaced every few years. Cleaning supplies consisted of a new broom each year as well as an occasional bar of soap. Chalk was needed but blackboard erasers were a later school refinement.

In 1871 the district voted to build a new structure. Lorenzo Hunt was paid \$50 for a plot of land; it cost the trustees \$2 to record the deed. Charles Craw was hired to do the carpentry; he earned \$1,021. The old schoolhouse and its woodshed were sold for \$50. A short time later William Smith charged \$7.50 to build privies by the new schoolhouse; Amos Smith got \$1.50 for extra work on them. It was now necessary to insure the new building and that was done through L. Ramsdell at a cost of \$11.10.

As near as can be determined the school year ran for 37 or 38 weeks, with an occasional summer term. The turnover in teaching staff was heavy, few staying more than one or two years. Miss Reed taught the summer session of 1866 for \$32.89. The wage bill for the regular session of 1866-67 was \$213.50. Other teachers included Asher Norton, William Hull, L. H. Wade and Ivan Gifford.

By the latter part of the nineteenth century a new shingle roof was needed. William Chesbro did that labor for \$10; Bloomer Griffin helped for \$1 in cash.

The turn of the century saw the school budget growing to just under \$500, a very substantial amount for the time. We find purchases of maps, a globe and a greater variety of instructional items. Shortly before World War I pupils were required to receive a physical examination; Dr. McCabe examined as many as 23 children for a fee of \$20. And we find during this period additional money coming in for non-resident tuition – children living in neighboring districts. Teacher Retirement System deductions cost \$4.60 in 1914; wages had risen to \$56 the month!

The school year of 1916 was a prosperous one with a surplus of \$35.73 – income being \$767.81 and expenses \$732.08. Balance on hand August 1 was \$32.12; public money from the state amounted to \$114.92; retirement fund deduction was \$5.32; tui-

tion for non-resident pupils brought in \$53.67; the real property tax in the district raised \$561.58, and miscellaneous income of \$.20 came from the sale of 12 surplus bricks.

In these years we read such names as Truman Ingalls, A. C. Youmans, Ivan Gifford, George Tucker, Harold Bell, Peter R. Stevens, Floyd Bear and Stanley Ingalls submitting bills for supplies, hauling or labor.

The second Trustees' Record Book contains entries which commence in 1918. The budget for the 1918-1919 school year amounted to \$837.27, broken down as follows:

Teachers wages	\$721.50
Coal and wood	66.44
Cleaning schoolhouse	4.25
Refund of school tax	1.08
Oiling the floor	2.00
Library books	27.50
Dr. McCabe, Health Officer	14.50

In a departure from the earlier record book, this second one contained a list of the district property owners, their assessed valuations and the amounts of their school taxes. Among the surnames of such district property owners were Bear, Bell, Gardner, Hunt, Husted, Ingalls, Joy, Stanton, Tryon, Tallman, VerPlanck, Van Auken and Yeomans. Four telephone companies were taxed in the district – the Medusa and Greenville, the Oak Hill and Norton Hill, Lambs Corners, and the Freehold and Wright Street. The final tax list for the year 1929-30 shows a total real property assessed valuation of \$89,875 and taxes levied amounting to \$808.88.

Unlike many one-room schoolhouses which were either abandoned or sold off to be converted into private dwellings, the Norton Hill school building survives for public use as part of the community's religious complex.

*The Society acknowledges the gift of the two Trustees' Record Books from T. Merritt Elliott of Norton Hill.*

□□□□□□

**YOUR MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL  
FORM IS ENCLOSED . . .  
MAIL IT BACK PROMPTLY**

Greene County Historical Society  
Raymond Beecher, Editor  
R.D.  
COXSACKIE, NEW YORK 12051

NON-PROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
U. S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
CATSKILL, N. Y. 12414  
PERMIT NO. 91