

# Greene County Historical Journal

A Publication of the Greene County Historical Society, Inc.

U.S. Route 9-W

Coxsackie, N.Y. 12051

Vol. 7, Issue 2

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Summer, 1983

## JOHN ALEXANDER THOMSON (1778 - 1846), CATSKILL MERCHANT Raymond Beecher

Of the three Catskill Thomson brothers, sons of Dr. Thomas and Sarah Thomson, John Alexander remained the homebody; James Harvey relocated in New York City; Thomas T. was also attracted to that mercantile center but soon agreed to travel to Demerara, British Guiana, as a collection agent for his employer. James Harvey married, had children, and died a comparatively young man; Thomas T. became a prosperous South American trader in his own right, had a liaison relationship with a Priscilla Anderson which produced two sons who died at sea on the family's voyage to England in 1814; John Alexander never married. As a genial bachelor he provided a home for his spinster sister, Catherine, and eventually informally adopted his four Bartow nieces – Emily, Harriet, Frances and Maria. Until the return of Thomas T. Thomson to Catskill in 1815, John Alexander was the nominal head of family. This position he readily yielded to his brother, Thomas T., after the latter established his newly constructed country seat – Cedar Grove (Thomas Cole Estate).

After the death of Thomas T. in 1821, John Alexander again assumed head-of-family status. He would eventually sell out his Main Street store, become an important New York State horticulturist especially interested in fruit and the Rohan potato, participate in the Catskill land boom, be subject to lawsuits connected with Thomas T. Thomson's estate, and die at Cedar Grove in 1846. Thomas Cole, the artist, would then pen messages to various Catskill families to attend the funeral services; one such note survives in the Vedder Memorial Library archives. Thomas Cole would also become one of his executors.

These three brothers' parents, Dr. and Mrs. Thomas Thomson had removed from Columbia County to the village of Catskill shortly after the close of the Revolutionary War. On a section of the Lindsey patent, running from the westerly side of Main Street down to the Catskill Creek, Dr. Thomson had constructed a stone residence which, until the building of Cedar Grove in 1815, was the Thomson family residence. After the death of Dr. Thomson, the village property was subdivided among the several heirs. Here on one subplot John Alexander Thomson conducted his hardware and crockery business. When Thomas T. returned in 1815, he financed the construction of a double brick store. John Alexander would occupy one part and Mark Spencer, married to Harriet Thomson, the other.

The exact date of John Alexander's opening his



John A. Thomson - sketched by Frederic E. Church

hardware store is uncertain but it is assumed to be about the year 1800. Much of the selling was on credit, particularly on the wholesale level. His record books indicate numerous orders for fireplace equipment, hollowware (tea kettles, pots, skillets), sleigh runners, fulling mill cranks and metal mill parts. An order to Robert McQueen & Company dated November 12, 1815 indicates the volume of Thomson trade:

I am in want of 4 tons of hollow ware. Am informed you are owners of a furnace . . . .

6 doz. fire dogs (3 sizes)  
60 skillets  
100 griddles  
100 tea kettles  
35 bake pans  
25 iron basons [sic]  
24 5 or 6 gall. Pots  
50 4 gall. Pots  
25 3 gall. Pots  
50 2 gall. Pots  
25 1 gall. Pots  
50 12 gall. Kettles & remainder of 4 tons to be made up of an equal number of 4, 3, 2, 1½, and 1 gall. kettles.

After a partial shipment arrived at Catskill, Thomson wrote indicating he was overstocked with 50 gallon large kettles and not enough spiders (legged frying pans), firedogs (andirons), tea kettles and skillets.

Among the businessmen to the westward dealing with John A. Thomson were Jehiel Tuttle, Bennet and Osborne, Zadock Pratt, G. & P. Palen, Truman H. Bagley, Jonas Krum and the firm of Strong and Tuttle. The merchandise was hauled by wagon westward on the busy Susquehanna Turnpike or other toll roads. As a gesture of good will Thomson fre-

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## John A. Thomson

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quently accepted boxes destined for merchants in the mountain towns. In one such case he wrote to the storekeeper at Roxbury that a box of books had been left for him at the Catskill Thomson store. He then alerted the Roxbury merchant that he had pot ash kettles of the largest size which could be had for \$100 and next size about 10 gallons less for \$90. In 1816 he was writing to Bennet and Osborne that he had received two crates from Messers Packer and Thornton, one of which Thomson sent on to the Windham store by the direction of the shipper. Thomson then asked for directions for the other crate.

There is also an indication from surviving records that Thomson wholesaled to Catskill and nearby hamlets. One reads the names of Erastus Beach, Ezra Hawley, Thomas O'Hara Crosswell, Ira Day, A. Van Vechten & Company, Hall and Spencer, Adam Burgett, Benjamin Comfort, Gaius Boughton and Cornwall & Spencer.

Each community had its mills for grinding grain, sawing lumber or dressing cloth; mill parts were in constant demand. On December 28, 1816 Thomson was writing to Gay and King accepting a proposal for two tons of mill cranks, "well wrought, the bearings turned in a lathe in the usual manner — the sweep to be 11½, 12 and 12½ . . ." Nail rods used by blacksmiths were also quoted at \$6.50 per 100.

In the early nineteenth century when each local bank was printing its own paper money, a merchant had to be alert to current price quotations. As a service to its business readers, the Catskill *Recorder* would include a listing of bills being accepted at par and which banks were being quoted at a discount. In Thomson's record books we find notations such as "discount on Philadelphia money \$5.75." For a time Thomson dealt with the Aqueduct Association bank in Catskill but on March 14, 1817 he learned to his dismay that that bank was accepting no more notes to be discounted for cash until the Albany political situation was clarified: "because of Pendleton's bill passing house/assembly the cashier refused to put out any more of the Aqueduct until he hears the result of said bill." This probably related to the rechartering of certain banking establishments.

Among the earliest Catskill merchants to recognize the domestic advantages of the cast ironplate cooking and heating stove over the open fireplace was John A. Thomson. He soon stocked a variety: Franklin Parlor stove #1, Pyramid, Lanes Patent as well as unidentified cook stoves and fireplaces without feet. James Wilson Company was a supplier of stoves but was not always able to ship promptly which occasioned Thomson to write on November 8, 1817 that Wilson should attend to the Thomson order sent him: "Six more of the Franklin no. 1 Parlor Stoves can be handled. November is the season for Selling Stoves. If

you send them I must have them immediately." As competition grew for the sale of stoves, Thomson complained in various letters of the poor profit margin "even with their being shipped disassembled." He would also note that certain foundry castings were lighter than the previous shipments. At times Thomson asked for credit. "It is next to impossible to collect cash in the country at present — cannot therefore make any certain calculation when we can make our payment in New York."

Much of the incoming freight to the Thomson store came by Hudson River sloop. Instructions were frequently included in orders to send by way of Captain Van Loan's sloop *Edmund* or his new sloop *Delaware*. At times when the more northerly stretches of the river were closed due to ice, Thomson would direct the shipper to send the merchandise as far as possible by water and Thomson would arrange for reshipment overland.

Handling heavy castings, etc. required manual labor. Assisting at the Thomson store were various individuals. One was Isaac Bishop for whom Thomson assumed responsibility for the board bill at \$3 the week.

In 1814, after the cessation of hostilities with England, Thomas T. Thomson left British Guiana for a trip to the British Isles. While there he studied the economic potential for the resale in America of English pottery and glassware. Not only was he considering some wholesale trade in the New York City market but he also wanted his brother to handle English crockery in his Catskill store.

After Thomson's return to America in 1815, we find him writing to his English factor Little, Wither- spoon and Humbertson, placing a substantial order; it is dated December 30, 1815:

The prospect for Spring goods considered very bad Mr. Graham [at N.Y.] advises me decidedly against it — have therefore to request you ship not goods for my acct. — except such of Crockeryware and herewith enclose you a list for — this is intended for a Crockery Store in the country which a Brother of mine is conducting — should it turn out well may lead to further business in this way — the articles are required to be good of the kind as described — tho' not of high prices (where the order is not sufficiently explicit) particularly the china teas [teacups] is required to be of Low to Middling quality — these are to be shipped at the earliest Spring opportunity so as to arrive here if possible in April — the freight I trust you will be able to obtain cheap . . ."

From surviving documents we are able to trace this particular shipment, much of it coming from the famous English Staffordshire potteries. John Renny, master of the Brig *William Wise*, took on the cargo, verifying the bill of lading and warranting delivery at New York "all and every Dangers and Accidents of the Seas and Navigation of whatsoever Nature and Kind excepted, unto Thomas T. Thomson Esq. or his Assigns, he or they paying freight for the said Goods, Thirty Shillings British per Ton of forty cubic feet

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and five percent primage." The latter was the allowance, in addition to wages, paid by a shipper or importer to the master of the vessel for the proper care of a specific shipment and the paperwork incident thereto. Due from Thomas T. Thomson was 105 pounds, 1 shilling and 9 pence for his crockery and glassware order.

The English order must have reached New York and Catskill without undue mishap as we find John A. Thomson advertising in the Catskill *Recorder*:

Just Received for Sale by J. A. Thomson

64 crates assorted crockery

13 crates & hhds Blue & Enamelled Ware

10 Hhds. fine Liverpool China & richly painted ware

5 casks Wine and Porter Bottles

It is obvious the pace of activity at Thomson's Catskill store was increasing since the return of his brother Thomas T. The latter was supplying extra capital. In late December 1815 the store was advertising several tons of hollowware for sale – iron pots, tea kettles, griddles, skillets, spiders and fire dogs. On March 6, 1816 he was informing the public he had on hand 1,000 bushels of Turk's Island salt, tar and cork which had just been landed at Catskill.

The glassware and crockery being sold at the J. A. Thomson store is an antique collector's delight. Cut glass pint and quart decanters, all styles; some salt cellars richly cut in the strawberry pattern; pocket bottles (flasks); ½ pint tumblers; wine glasses; ground stoppers (ordered separately).

Cruet frames of Japanned ware, holding from 4 to 7 bottles, as well as a variety of earthenware and Staffordshire "china" included in the Thomson order from England give us an opportunity to study the dining habits of the American middle class during this period. Much of the china was described as enamel painted, colored, mocha, or green edged, creamware, black painted or gold or silver lustre. Tureens and ladles, pudding dishes, tea cups and saucers, jugs, ewers, sugar boxes, tea pots and stands, butter tubs, slop bowls, plates of various types as well as complete sets of china are listed on the invoice of 4 pages with further descriptive terms such as Grecian shaped, pattern of sprig, shell, new cottage and landscape, Wellington, Tree, Hermit, Garland and Grecian flowers, Royal, Bath and Gothic ruins. What we know today as children's mugs were listed as cans lettered with "Present for Children."

The historical dark blue earthenware with American scenes so collectible today was merely ordered as six complete dining sets blue printed, various patterns, and 12 dozen blue printed plates. At that time such earthenware was the everyday dishes in common use, a fact difficult for today's collectors to appreciate. Britannia teapots with sugars and creamers to match were also included in the shipment. Thomas T. Thomson felt it worth the gamble to sell dessert sets such as Jasper (Wedgewood) and botanical flower designs.

And if these tablewares did not tempt the Catskill housewife in reserve were two hogsheds of enameled figurines for the mantel or best room table. The invoice lists these by name: Jack Tar and Mate, Wrestling Cupids, Babes in the Woods, Vicar and Moses at Midnight, Tythe Pigs, Sailors and Lasses on Shore, Shepherd and Mate and Stump, Prudence and Friendship, Simple Cimons [Simons], Sportsman and Archers, Ballard Singers and Dancers, Harlequin and Mate, as well as various ornaments of lions, sheep, goats, greyhounds, cock fowls as well as stag and hind. One conjectures if any of these mantel pieces, in pairs or singly, have survived in area families.

While Thomas T. Thomson was helping his brother by providing new brick store quarters and financing, he also assisted his brother-in-law Mark Spencer then married to the Thomson sister, Harriet. The other half of the brick block was available to Spencer for his retail establishment. Like John A. Thomson, Spencer sold both wholesale and retail. In the spring of 1816 he was informing the reading public that he was carrying a line of English and French dry goods, groceries, and brass kettles "at the new store opposite Botsford's Tavern." Botsford's was on the corner of Main and Thompson Streets. (Incidentally, it is believed Thompson Street was named for the Thomson family. Others had made errors in the spelling of Thomson as used by the family at that time. Even Thomas Cole spelled Thomson as Thompson in the funeral invitations he penned in 1846).

In May 1817, the *Recorder* newspaper advertised Mark Spencer's store was offering at wholesale: "St. Croix rum by the hhds., the same for New Orleans molasses and sugar; Chests of tea, boxes of raisins, bags of coffee, pipes of brandy, casks of wine, kegs of Virginia tobacco; also Holland and country gin; pepper and allspice." That same advertisement indicated a new assortment of handsome Dry Goods and that his India and European dry goods would be sold by the piece or the package. He also alerted the public he had just received two bales of India muslin and had clover seed for sale.

Like John Alexander Thomson, Mark Spencer eventually gave up the operation of his Catskill store. He served for a term in the New York legislature. His wife Harriet received a proportionate share in her brother Thomas T. Thomson's estate after the death of the latter in 1821.

By 1822 John A. Thomson, busily engaged in settling his brother's affairs and overseeing the operation of the Cedar Grove estate, appears to have given up his mercantile operations. Family tradition records that various pieces of china from his store were removed to the Cedar Grove residence. In Florence Cole Vincent's time they were displayed on open shelving in the small room off the southwest parlor.

Throughout his lifetime John Alexander Thomson was active in the social, political and economic

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## John A. Thomson

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life of Catskill. As a young man in 1795 he had subscribed 16 pounds toward the building of the Catskill Academy. Pinckney in his *Sketches of Catskill* identifies John Alexander as one of a committee of fifty involved in the real estate development across the creek in West Catskill. Railroads also attracted him as a source of potential profit. But the Panic of 1837 brought about the collapse of his real estate and railroad ventures, leaving him a poorer man. Additionally, he was plagued with lawsuits involving Thomas T. Thomson's business affairs, one suit finally being decided against that estate in the amount of \$10,000. In the latter years of his life he was forced to mortgage Cedar Grove borrowing money from Amos Cornwall. It was at this time that Thomas Cole, now married to Thomson's niece, Maria Bartlow, purchased the plot of ground on which he eventually built his new studio.

But the latter years of John A. Thomson's life were not all dismal. He took a special interest in assisting the four daughters of his sister, Maria Thomson Bartlow. They came to Catskill as young adolescents, were educated locally, and kept house for "Uncle Sandy." Of the four nieces — Emily, Harriet, Frances and Maria, only Maria married. And it was to these four relatives that John A. Thomson left Cedar Grove.

Cedar Grove was never a large farm in the sense of growing extensive grain crops. Rather it specialized in fruit, vegetables and some livestock. In 1817 while Thomas T. Thomson was still alive, 15 varieties of apple trees were set out including such favorites as Seek No Further, Flushing Spitzenbergh, Tallmans Sweeting, Kentish Codline, Ox Noble, Siberian Crab, Jacobin and Golden Pippin. Other fruits grown were pears, plums, peaches and cherries.

It was a period of scientific farming and John Alexander Thomson, after he retired from mercantile operations, became deeply involved in the cultivation from Europe. In the NYS Library's archives will be found Thomson's extensive correspondence relating to the Rohan potato.

As the fruit trees matured and the village of Catskill expanded outwardly toward the Cedar Grove estate, the temptation of local youth to take forbidden fruit was ever present. This led to Thomson's advertising in the *Catskill Recorder* under date of August 1, 1833:

Gentlemen, residing in Catskill and its vicinity are respectively requested to caution their children and domestics against trespassing upon my grounds; and more particularly from plundering my orchards and garden, as I am determined, in future, to prosecute all depredators, old and young, without distinction.

As one further aspect of settling Thomas T. Thomson's estate, John Alexander found himself responsible for the Catskill ferry operation. Upon his death this task fell to his executor, Thomas Cole.

(The ferry operations by the Cole family will be written up in a separate *Journal* article).

Hardware and crockery merchant, scientific farmer, foster parent to his four nieces, landlord of Thomas Cole, John Alexander Thomson led a full life. Down through the years he earned a place in Catskill's history; to the family he is still affectionately referred to by his nickname "Uncle Sandy."

*Primary source for this article has been the Florence Cole Vincent Memorial Collection at Bronx Museum, the gift of Edith Cole Silberstein and Thomson archival material in the NYS Library.*

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## STANTON HILL IN THE 1870'S — THE MOSES BEDELL DIARIES (Part IV — Conclusion)

Frances Dietz & Raymond Beecher

*The social fabric of this upland rural farming community of New Baltimore, Greene County, as recorded by Moses Bedell, is the subject of a concluding series of vignettes which commenced in the Fall 1982 Journal. The illustrations as well as the diaries were made available by Walter E. Burke, Jr. of Florida.*

MARRIAGES of relatives and friends were usually noted in Moses Bedell's diary. His own marriage in 1870 to Sarah Powell had ended with her death after four short years together. His grief is reflected in diary notes couched in the Victorian phrases of his era, but they convey his desolation. On Christmas Day in 1875 after returning from a family dinner in Coxsackie he 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." And at another time he wrote, "I have been feeling lonely today. My thoughts have wandered back to the few short years with the one that is gone. Words can hardly express my feelings . . . such a heart sickening memory of life a longing almost for death."

In 1878 Moses married Miss Emma Crane of Ripon, Wisconsin. He seems to have first met her on September 29, 1876 when Quaker neighbor Mrs. Emily Hoag called at his house with "2 Miss Cranes from Wisconsin." They had come east to visit friends and relatives. Eleven days later Moses mentioned that young Frank Hoag and Josie Garrett and a Miss Em Crane came and stayed for dinner. That evening all the young people went to William Posson's (another Quaker neighbor) for a party and Moses was included. His diary says there were 70 there. He evidently provided the conveyance for he wrote, "We broke the spring of the wagon coming home."

A little over three weeks later Moses took his young lady nieces Josie and Ida Garrett to New Baltimore to visit Quaker J. B. Gurney who lived in the home on New Street later occupied by Miss Julia Carhart. Moses wrote, "Frank, Lydia, Fanny [Hoag] and the two Miss Cranes were there."

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## Moses Bedell Diaries

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Moses made no more mention of Emma until the summer of 1878 when he indicates correspondence with "E. C." By October 25 of that year he was off on a trip to the midwest with the first stop at Chicago where he attended a Friends Meeting during the evening. Next he was on to St. Louis and finally to the Crane home in West Rosendale, Wisconsin. Emma and Moses were married there on November 4 at 7:20 a.m. by the Reverend Mr. Whitney upon whom Moses bestowed five dollars. The newlyweds took the long train trip home by way of Niagara Falls. Arriving at Coxsackie by boat, they were brought up to the family homestead by relatives to find a large assembly of neighbors, relatives, and fellow Quakers waiting to tender them a reception. It lasted until 1 a.m.

The diary entries that Moses made about marriages on Stanton Hill are a historian's delight:

December 30, 1875: Father and I got up this morning at 5 o'clock, foddered and milked and then went to Edward's. Emma and Bronk were married at 7:30, ate breakfast, and at 9 started for Washington. [The bride was Moses' niece Emma Garrett, the daughter of his only sister Maria and Edward Garrett. The Garretts lived on today's Dugway Road in the home now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. George Boehlke. The groom was Bronk VanSlyke, son of Ephraim and Mary VanderZee VanSlyke, who lived on Dean's Mill Road where the VanSlyke family still lives.]

Wed. Oct. 13, 1875: Wm. Harden and Jennie Clay were married this morning at 9 o'clock and gone off. Thomas Hotaling and Alace Bedell also has slipped off.

January 9, 1876: Emma & Bronk's wedding party was held at Ephraim Van Slykes last night.

January 12, 1876: I had an invitation to Ephraim Van Slykes but did not go. Levi Bedell has his wooden wedding anniversary tonight.

December 28, 1876: Darwin Powell married a Thompkins.

December 29, 1876: Darwins wedding party at Smith Powells tonight.

April 16, 1879: Some think that Smith [Powell] and Lydia [Garrett] have gone to get married. Albert and Caroline went with them to Warren Hathaways [Medway minister].

April 22, 1879: Got up at 12½ o'clock last night and went to Smith Powells to horn him & Lydia. They left Coxsackie about 9 o'clock. There was about 20 there. I got home at 3¼. Some stayed until after 6 in the morning but could not get Smith out. We all got in the window upstairs.

December 3, 1879: Ida Garrett & John Carman were married at 8 p. m. Father went to Marias to wedding tonight. Ida and John were married by Mr. Hammond.

December 4, 1879: John and Ida started for NY City on the [steamboat] McManus. [Ida was Moses' niece — another daughter of his sister Maria and the late Edward Garrett. The Carmans were early Quaker residents of New Baltimore.]

SOCIAL LIFE was more localized in the 1870's than today; money for traveling was generally limited. Visiting of an afternoon, an occasional evening party, church social parties, husking bees, seranading newlyweds, schoolhouse programs, band concerts and

picnics were all part of the ongoing aspects of Stanton Hill entertainment.

On February 14, 1879 Emma and Moses "went with Jerry [Coonley] to the Corners [Medway] this evening to a Valentine party, bo't one valentine .05, cake supper 25¢ couple, oysters raw 3 plates .15 each, .45, 2 oranges .10, peanuts .05 and put .10 in a lottery to draw a quilt. Josie [Garrett] came home with Jerry and we came with Maria's load [Maria Bedell Garrett]. Willie Garrett & Sebra Possin were along. Had a very nice time. Got home about 1 o'clock. Miss Alger [schoolteacher] went off with S. Coonley."

Fourth of July celebrations were a major event with speeches, recitations, music and food. On July 4, 1878 "Froze 6 qts. ice cream. Put in a horse with George L. [Coonley] and got Jacob's [Bedell] wagon and all went to Medway to picnic except Father. Bo't 2 bouquets .15, lemonade .10. Miss Strong read Declaration of Independence. Music — speech by Warren Hathaway. Hoags & Possins & our load ate our dinner in the woods. Gave ice cream away that was left. Clayton went home. I went home with the girls. Thunder shower — drove in Jonathan Searle's wagon house and then in Mr. Story's — borrowed waterproofs."

The Catskill Mountains were a summer attraction. Many Greene County families made an effort to visit the mountains. On August 15, 1878 Moses and George L. Coonley undertook a day's trip to see the Mountain House and Kaaterskill Falls.

The county fair was another magnet. On September 20, 1877 Moses and Jerry Coonley left Stanton Hill at half past three in the morning, driving by way of Oak Hill. They arrived at the Cairo fair grounds about 7 a.m. The expenses of such a day's expedition were always recorded: "Put horse in stable .50, Got my breakfast .50, Paid going to fair .25, Bo't plate of oysters .25, cup of coffee and pie .15, Lemonade, peanuts .15, 2 bottles leather & rubber cement .25, package of plants .24 — Total \$2.20." The fair that day was crowded, the weather pleasant. The two men, while at Cairo, made a visit to the Poor House, possibly to see some indigent New Baltimore friend. The ride home on "dusty roads" was by a different route — one by way of South Cairo, Sandy Plains and the Community [Earlton]. They arrived home at 9 p.m.; it was a long day for both men.

As mention heretofore, the Bedell homestead was a mecca for both weekday and Sunday visitors. One wonders how the farm work ever got done with so many interruptions. Some callers were merely passing through from the hamlet to their homes farther to the west. Others were from greater distances such as Otis T. Bedell and children who wintered in New York City and later had Aratoga Park at South Cairo. Jacob B. Gurney of the hamlet

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## Moses Bedell Diaries

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called, bringing Benjamin Gue and wife of Iowa, Benjamin being a former Lieutenant Governor of that state. He grew up in New Baltimore, his mother was Catharine Gurney.

Christmas was a time for socializing with dinner invitations frequently given. In 1876 the Bedell household went to the William Hoags' to eat roast turkey.

Husking bees accomplished a useful task while providing inexpensive entertainment, particularly for the young people. On October 17, 1877 Moses "killed the pig and invited hands to a husking . . . 23 came to our husking until about 10." Three days later they were at Jacob Bedell's farm to "husk his corn all out."

After Moses made his trip to Florida one winter, the Bedell household had two small alligators as pets. Parents and their children were vastly intrigued and frequently called to see the alligators. One finally died and the other disappeared.

The schoolhouse provided a modicum of entertainment put on by the children or the community itself; we read of lantern slide shows. Jerry Coonley and Moses also managed to get to Coeymans Hollow for occasional events such as a lecture on October 22, 1877: "ticket .35, cost of book purchased \$1.75."

At home the Bedells were willing to allow some types of card playing in the house — the game of Authors was a favorite and was thought to have educational benefits. Moses enjoyed playing dominoes at Harden's.

Families were invited to house and outbuilding raising as well as to husking bees; men got to plowing contests when new machinery was being tested. Some of these events combined useful work with an opportunity to socialize with neighbors.

On May 14, 1879 "Albert's Levi called this eve. to invite help to raise their shed." (This was a 70 foot structure which was put up the following afternoon). One July day the men of the community assembled at J. Zebulon Hallock's place to observe a competition of new mowing machines. Jacob Nelson brought word on October 15, 1877 that help was needed by Harvey Shear to raise his barn the following afternoon. One realizes what a blessing the party line telephone must have been to later generations.

Musicians functioned in the area, probably at Medway. Mention is made of going to that place to a dance in the blacksmith shop for the benefit of the local band. Another time the Bedells were at The Corners to an organ concert: "three organs on trial — the church was nearly full."

RELIGION held an important place in Bedell lives; they were of the Society of Friends (Quakers), remaining with the Orthodox group as the Hicksites split off. The effort of Moses Bedell to revitalize the Quaker faith on Stanton Hill by the repair and the reopening of the meeting house at that location was

noteworthy. Between times, when Quaker services were not held, the Bedells occasionally participated in religious assemblies in Medway's Methodist and Christian churches as well as at Coeymans Hollow. The latter place frequently attracted father Joseph Bedell. On Christmas night, 1878, Moses opened the Bedell homestead for a community prayer meeting.

Father Joseph Bedell, John Possons (hired boy) and Moses were attracted to the evangelistic service held by Martin Bronk. Martins' father was Peter P. Bronk whose farm on Beers' 1867 map of New Baltimore can be identified as the one later owned by Charles Hallock and today by Charles Shaffer on High Rocks Road. Moses noted in his diary: "He is formerly from Rocky Store. He [Martin Bronk] intends to be a second Moody."

On the first Sunday in September, 1877, Moses went with a group of friends and relatives "to Grapeville to meeting. Took our dinner along. Heard some very good speaking from John Bennet Anderson and others. It was estimated there were about 2000 people there. Bought water mellon 15¢, peaches 10¢, peanuts 10¢. Went to the Blue Spring. The water is very cold. Father went to Coeymans Hollow. The Levi Garretts broke the ex [axle] to their wagon coming home."

The Bible Society had a friend in Moses: On January 11, 1877 he went collecting for the Bible Society (he called it begging). Two days later he was at the house of H. H. Hinman in New Baltimore hamlet to give him Bible money collected — \$5, and 55¢ for a Bible sold.

Moses was also attracted to other evangelistic camp meeting services. On Sunday, September 7, 1879: "Addie, Miss Whitney, Clara and I went to the negro camp meeting near Coxsackie. Peleg [Lawton] and wife went with horse and buggy. Took our dinner along. A large crowd and a pleasant day for the occasion. 4 horses died there from over driving or other causes."

Uncle Lewis Bedell had responsibility for the closed Stanton Hill Meeting House. He and nephew Moses came to an understanding. On January 15, 1875 Moses recorded in his diary: "Uncle Lewis came here and told me I could have the meeting house." Thereafter Moses, Uncle Lewis and others began the repair of the structure and its horse shed.

Friends of the Quaker persuasion, in response to Moses Bedell's visitation in Dutchess County, arrived at Stanton Hill at irregular intervals for services. By word of mouth a congregation was assembled, the services continuing for two or three days.

Uncle Lewis is known to have preached at Sodom. The small frame church there was across the road north of the district school No. 6; both are shown of Beers' 1867 map. The church has been razed, but the school house still stands at the junction of Sodom Road and Shady Lane.

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## Moses Bedell Diaries

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MILLING the Bedell grains either for family or livestock use required a trip to Dean's Mill on the Hannacroix. Other mills in the area might have been available such as the one at Honey Hollow or at Coxsackie but tradition and nearness to Jeremiah Dean's establishment attracted the Bedell business. Besides the grist mill, the Dean complex could cut lumber and grind plaster. In the winter the pond served as a source of ice.

An exception to the Dean's Mill use is noted in the diary for October 20, 1879 when Moses took six bushels of corn to D. Hallock's steam mill, to be picked up the next day. This is believed to have been a portable type mill and was useful away from water sites and during periods of low water or extreme cold.

By the 1870's wheat flour was purchased by the barrel either at the Albany market or at the hamlet of New Baltimore. With the competition from the mid-western wheat fields it did not pay the New Baltimore farmers to produce their own wheat and pay for the mill grinding. However, buckwheat and rye flour and cornmeal were a different story. And a mixture of coarse grains could be fed to the livestock, a grinding service readily available.

FRUIT CULTURE became a major economic endeavor on the Moses Bedell farm as improved transportation was developed to the metropolitan areas. His forebears had planted fruit trees soon after settling the land but Moses, from 1875 onward, greatly expanded the orchards; he replaced many of the older trees with newer varieties with more marketable value. Apple, plum, peach, pear, cherry and quince were the fruit crops. Young trees were generally purchased from nursery agents except for peach trees; Moses did experiment with the grafting process but with limited success. In his diaries Moses notes his peach system — in the late fall he planted the pits; the next spring he dug them up, split them open and then replanted same. Within a few years he had young peach trees to set out.

Among the 800 young fruit trees Moses purchased in May of 1874 were varieties of apples such as Russet, Northern Spy, Baldwin, Greenings and Seek-no-Further.

Spraying was not the headache of today's orchardists. Each spring, however, a soft soap solution was prepared and applied to the trees — a tedious chore.

Barrels for the shipment of apples and pears were manufactured close to this fruit-producing section of the Hudson Valley. At times Moses contracted in advance for new barrels and at other times he used second hand ones. Empties came back from the city on the freight boats. On May 29, 1876 a Mr. Jackson called at the Bedell farm and succeeded in securing Moses' order for 300 new barrels.

Most of the Stanton Hill fruit was shipped via the Hudson River vessels to the metropolitan areas.

After the Lounsberry canning factory started up operations in Coxsackie, representatives would call on various fruit farmers, including Moses, to contract for applesauce windfalls at seventy-five cents the bushel.

A profitable by-product of apple culture was vinegar; Moses sold barrels of it annually.

HORSE—DRAWN VEHICLES were the means of transportation except when Stanton Hill residents reached the river and used the steamboats, or crossed over to use the railroad on the east side of the Hudson. Locally the Bedells and others were known to get places by walking if necessary. Borrowing wagon, sleigh or carriage, and the horses to pull them was a neighborly affair when emergencies arose.

Each spring the Bedells put their cutter and their bob sleigh up and got out the wheeled vehicles. The axles were cleaned and greased. The buggy was overhauled, oiling the wheels and putting on washers. Painting the vehicle was also a task for farm families, few being willing to pay for a skilled paint job with fancy gold striping and other decoration. Moses had his carriage painted at the wagon shop at Medway Four Corners.

Scarcely a week went by without a note in Moses' diaries that a trip had been made to one of the several local blacksmith shops to have a horse shod or repairs made to a vehicle.

EDUCATION — at Stanton Hill was of the 19th century one-room school house variety; the building was on today's School Hill Road about three quarters of a mile from the Moses Bedell homestead. Its problems were normal for the time. Moses Bedell was one of the school trustees, being responsible for posting notices of meetings, signing the school bond for the father of Jerry Coonley, and also signing the collector's school warrant together with Jerry Coonley. In December 1875 Moses had a personal school tax bill of \$11.53 on his farm of over 100 acres with its homestead residence and the several outbuildings.

The school teacher turnover was heavy but one could usually be found. At times it was necessary to recruit. A letter inviting Miss Alger, Knox Street, Albany, to take the school was delivered by Moses on one of his Albany marketing trips.

It was the Stanton Hill practice to "board the teacher around." The Bedells were more than willing to house Miss Alger for a remuneration from the local school board. After a winter's stay at the Bedells, on May 7, 1879 "Sam Coonley moved Miss Alger to Smith Powells."

While they were still pre-school age, we read that Moses' little girls visited the school on two occasions, one being the last day of school for the term.

Periodically there was entertainment either provided by the students or else brought in by the trustees. Moses would record such entries as the one of Friday, March 17, 1876 which notes "It is the last day of school [winter term] and spelling school tonight."

*(continued on page 18)*

## VEDDER LIBRARY NOTES

◇□ Two major genealogical publications have been added to the collection through the generosity of the authors. The volumes are: Mary Soper – *The Roper Family Bible Record*; L. May Carman – *My Family (1631 - 1981)*.

◇□ Files containing early correspondence for the Vedder Memorial Library to and from Charles E. Dornbush, the first librarian, have been donated by him as part of an effort to preserve the written history of this important Greene County research facility.

◇□ The need for a catalog in published form for the manuscript holdings in the Vedder Library has long been recognized. To study what has been accomplished elsewhere, the library purchased Tomareo's *A Guide to the Manuscript Collection of the Goshen Library and Historical Society*.

◇□ Shirley A. Mearns of Ulster County, a co-author of the pamphlet *Ammi Phillips and Company – Popular Taste in Face Painting*, has deposited a copy with the Vedder Library.

◇□ Calvin S. Borthwick, a strong supporter of this Society and its library, formerly of Cornwallville and now of New Jersey, has been of help in accumulating information concerning Seneca M. Elliott and his Shady Glen boarding house. Via Mr. Borthwick the Williams family has sent five photographs and a letter written by Elliott to George Williams. After selling his boarding house, Seneca M. Elliott toured the world and finally settled on the outskirts of Los Angeles, California. Research will eventually lead to a *Journal* article.

◇□ Kenneth Van Vechten Parks has copied information from the Timmerman cemetery at Round Top; Jacob Timmerman buried in that private cemetery is his great, great, great grandfather. Genealogical researchers have reason to be grateful to Mr. Parks since in the early 1930's, with the assistance of his grandmother Jessie Van Vechten Vedder, he copied numerous tombstone entries now in the Vital Statistics card file at this library.

◇□ Interest in historic structures continues to grow. We are pleased to acknowledge the publication issued by the Greene County Planning Department: *A Description of the Greene County Historic Resource Inventory; Phase I* (Athens, Coxsackie, Prattsville).

◇□ More Greene County sheet music. Mrs. Richard Shoemaker of Catskill has donated Alida Driscoll's *Three Compositions* c. 1911, dedicated to Miss Jessie C. Chase. Also from the same source is a copy of *Silvery Moonbeams* composed by Jessie Camp, c. 1895.

◇□ Trustee Florence Hunter has contributed French's *Gazeteer of the State of New York*, 1860; its binding is in superb condition for the age of the volume.

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## Moses Bedell Diaries

(continued from page 17)

BOARDERS were accommodated during the summer months in most of the large farmhouses in New Baltimore township at this period. Ambitious farmwives welcomed the supplementary income, and the practice continued to be lucrative for decades. Most summer vacationists came from the New York metropolitan area, but we first learn from Moses Bedell's June 1879 diary entries that a few families from Albany were expected at the Bedell Homestead. That previous fall Emma and Moses had employed Rob and Sandy Wilson to build closets for their own use and possibly for potential boarders. Emma may well have suggested this economic activity.

On June 19, 1879 Moses noted Mr. Horton and son came down from Albany to the hamlet of New Baltimore for the purpose of securing summer accommodations for his wife, their six children and the servant. Transportation from the hamlet was provided by Moses – the Hortons inspected both George L. Coonley's place and the Bedell farmhouse. Neither place seemed to suit. Five days later the Bedells were more fortunate – a letter came from Harry Edwards, 87 Dove Street, Albany, requesting rooms for four. Emma and Moses decided new bedroom furniture was a necessity and were off to Coxsackie to purchase a black walnut marble top bedroom set for \$60; the furniture, except spring and mattress, came back with them in the wagon.

The Bedells were soon to find out the boarding house trade had its ups and downs. A Mr. Corning's family was taken in but Mr. Corning committed suicide in the city while his family was in the country. One family disputed the size of the bill. But Emma and Moses must have seen potential in the business for in the early 1880's Moses purchased the large home in New Baltimore hamlet on Route 144 along the Hudson which they named Cedar Cliff House. This is the present residence of the Ronald Newton family.

While still at Stanton Hill Moses made numerous diary entries concerning their 1879 boarding season:

July 7, 1879: Went to New Baltimore and brought up Mrs. Edwards and 2 boys. Peleg [hired man] went and brought her trunk.

July 11, 1879: Heard bad news of Mr. Clarence Cornings death at Albany. Was found dead on the lounge – cause is supposed by an overdose of laudanum. A young man came to tell Mrs. Corning of it. I got Georges wagon and took them to Albany – 5 of them – Mrs. Corning & son, Mr. Horton and 2 men. Started at 4 got there at 7¼ o'clock. Charged \$5.

July 12, 1879: Mr. Carpenter paid me \$10 for one weeks board.

July 19, 1879: Sunday I carried Mrs. Carpenter and Mrs. Edwards to New Baltimore to take the boat for Albany. Went to New Baltimore again to meet the boat . . . Mr. and Mrs. Edwards & Mrs. Carpenter & grandson came back.

July 20, 1879: Mrs. Carpenter paid for one weeks board \$10. Mr. Carpenter paid \$1 to New Baltimore and back.

(continued on page 19)





This photograph of the Bedell family taken on the south lawn of Cedar Cliff House in New Baltimore about 1898 shows Moses and Emma Crane Bedell seated on the lawn bench in front center. On the bench at the right is daughter Clara dressed in white shirt-waist. Daughter Ada, in white dress, is seated on the bench at the left. In the left background son Chester in the pony cart, while Ralph, wearing straw hat, stands beside the cart. Other persons in the picture are presumed to be summer guests. The photograph is by Charles Durand, Cossackie.

*Photo is from the Walter E. Burke, Jr. Collection*

*(continued on page 20)*

## Moses Bedell Diaries

(continued from page 19)

July 21, 1879: Mr. & Mrs. Carpenter and grandson had Bill [the horse] & carriage to Coxsackie \$1. They got home at 1 o'clock.

July 23, 1879: Mrs. Edwards called Emma up in her room to settle and because they did not agree she misued her very much so that we had to sit up with her [Emma] most of the night.

July 24, 1879: I carried Mrs. Edwards to New Baltimore and sent her home. She paid me \$18.35.

July 26, 1879: Took Mr. and Mrs. Carpenter and their grandson to Coxsackie to Mr. Watts. He paid me \$14 - \$10 for board [plus] \$2½ for boy - \$1.50 for horse & taking them to Coxsackie.

The use of the term board rather than room and board indicates most of the charge was considered for food provided, the room being available anyway and not representing out-of-pocket expense to the farm owner.

### CONTINUUM

Frank Crandell of the hamlet of New Baltimore recalls Moses Bedell and family well. His recollections begin around 1893. By then the Bedells had been living at the Cedar Cliff House and accommodating summer guests for some ten years. Daughters Clara and Ada were now young ladies who worked with their stepmother Emma in taking care of the boarders. The girls went to the New Baltimore Reformed Church and also taught in the Sunday School.

By now Moses and Emma had three sons, Ceylon, Chester, and Ralph born respectively in 1879, 1882, and 1885. Mr. Crandell went to grade school at the time Chester and Ralph were in the upper grades and Frank was in the primary department. Ceylon was already out of school. Chester's legs were crippled, either congenitally or from a bout with polio; Frank remembers how he always got about with great agility on crutches. Frank had an unexpected reunion with Ralph in a store in Selkirk in 1936; many childhood recollections were shared.

Every fall Moses departed for Florida to manage his citrus grove and returned in the spring. The rest of the family stayed in New Baltimore, presumably because the boys were in school, or perhaps traveling conditions and living accommodations were such that Emma and his daughters did not wish to uproot themselves.

Frank was then too young to be interested in the considerable amounts of fruits and vegetables produced in the Bedells' garden. He also has no idea why the family left Stanton Hill for the hamlet.

Moses kept a fine team of horses and Frank was a happy boy when invited to ride somewhere with him.

Cedar Cliff House was relatively modern and rather more elaborate than most local homes at the time Moses acquired it. It was built by Frank Crandell's great-uncle Henry, an executive of the original Albany Street Railway. His wife thought she wanted a house in the country, but she became disenchanted with it and they soon sold it and moved back to the

city. The Crandell family never understood why she had such a huge house built since she and Henry had no children.

It is pertinent to note the following New Baltimore news item in the *Catskill Recorder* for August 22, 1902:

Albert Whittaker of Brooklyn is among the new arrivals at the Cedar Cliff House. The members of the Whittaker family have been regular summer visitors to this village for many years. Other arrivals at Cedar Cliff are Otto Loech of Brooklyn, John Emlinson and T. T. Richard of Elizabeth, N. J.

As a youngster, Mr. Crandell sometimes wondered how Cedar Cliff House could hold all its guests in spite of its size.

Life came to a close for Moses Bedell on the afternoon of August 22, 1912. He died at Cedar Cliff House and the funeral services were held there. He was buried among his Quaker ancestors in the Stanton Hill cemetery. Emma died in 1934 in Hartford, Connecticut where she had evidently been living near her sons Ceylon and Chester. She too was buried at Stanton Hill. According to the *New Baltimore correspondent* for the *Ravena News Herald*, Moses had become rather seriously ill while in Florida during the winter of 1910-1911 and his health deteriorated from that time onward. During his 69 eventful years the Industrial Revolution had brought about enormous changes in farming, travel, religious observances, health, education, and local government. During the transition from candle light to electricity and from ox teams to automobiles, Moses Bedell had been an alert observer and a diligent participant.

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COXSACKIE, NEW YORK 12051

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