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WEST GREENVILLE, ERSTWHILE MARBLE PILLAR

—Raymond Beecher

As the village of Greenville has expanded westerly, the distinction between it and West Greenville has become less clear. This was not always the situation. For more than a century and a half after the development of the Prevost Patent, West Greenville was a separate hamlet; at one time it had its own school, church, hotel, mills and small businesses. As late as the 1970's weekly county newspapers carried West Greenville news under that specific heading.

The geographic boundaries of West Greenville have never been legally specified but are generally felt to be along Route 81 commencing at Scripture Bridge over the Basic Creek, onward to Maple Avenue; its northern boundary was the Greene-Albany county line, while on the south it was "halfway to Freehold." The hub, if hub there was, was the four corners — Route 81, Ingalside and Red Mill roads.

Ongoing research has failed to reveal the decade in which West Greenville received the appellation of Marble Pillar. Oral history passed down through the

years maintains that a shaft of white stone was, in early Victorian years, installed near the hotel at the four corners. From that time local residents began to refer to the hamlet as Marble Pillar after this distinctive landmark. This is also documented by a Smith family real property deed now in possession of Mr. and Mrs. Gundersen of Mill Farm, West Greenville. It refers to "a Saw Mill, Mill Yard and Water Power, as the same is used for Mill purposes, in running and carrying on said Mill. Situated in said Town and bounded on the west by the Public Highway running from (formerly) Sherrill's Mills, now the Red Mills, to West Greenville, formerly known as Marble Pillar . . ." Just when the Marble Pillar disappeared is equally obscure. Did the stone just physically deteriorate or was it taken up and used for other purposes such as stone steps or foundation support? Was it originally a horse hitching post of a whitish stone with the appearance of marble? As late as the 1930's the Coonley residence (now site of The Cabin) had a large blue-grey stone with iron appendages which remained from the horse and buggy days.



*Saw
and
Grist Mills
at
West
Greenville*

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Early settlers on this portion of the Prevost Patent purchased from the patentee on easy terms after Major Augustine Prevost established clear title. Among these surnames are Post, Ingalls, Ramsdell, Hopkins, Beddon, Hickok, Calhoun, Chamberlain, Craw, Scofield, Rockwell, Horton, Norton, Raymond and Page. By 1815 the going price had reached ten dollars the acre; the small family farms generally averaged between 50 and 100 acres. Augustine Prevost would record in his journal that Frederick Hegeman was contracting for "a lott of 37 acres and 2 rods in lott 38, being the residue of what was Dan Horton's farm and adjoining lott 47, \$10 the acre. Also a farm on lott 47 SW my patent to John Murray at \$10 per acre - 44 acres 2 rods - payable \$100 per annum with interest until paid."

In this section of Greene County, unlike the area nearer the Hudson River, few stone houses were ever constructed; even Hush Hush, the Prevost manor house, was a relatively plain clapboard structure. The local saw mills provided a quantity of lumber for the earlier crude farm dwellings. Few purchasers could afford to employ a contractor such as Fitch Lamphere of Medusa - Rensselaerville who, in 1793, signed a contract with Augustine Prevost to construct the latter's new dwelling house of several rooms with cellars, grain loft, numerous windows, fireplaces in each room and interior paneling. Even Augustine Prevost must have had trouble getting together the 525 pounds (\$1,312.25) to finance the building of his manor house.

For the first few decades of the nineteenth century, after the development of the patent, the Prevosts were the leading family. Set apart from their neighbors by a more elaborate lifestyle based upon negro slaves, hired help, sizeable land holdings with water rights, and their ability to travel about the area with horses and carriage, Augustine and his second wife, Anna Bogardus Prevost, reared a large family of offspring.

Well-educated himself for the time, Augustine Prevost did not neglect the similar needs of his children, both girls and boys. Prior to the establishment of the Greenville Academy in 1815, to which Augustine contributed both land and money (land via Presbyterian Church), he maintained a simple schoolhouse at West Greenville on the manor land. Here his children and those of his neighbors so interested, were to be found in attendance. The employment of a competent instructor was also a responsibility he assumed. A few of the instructors' names survive. A Mr. Cornell was paid \$12 the month and was provided with board and lodging; Mr. Cornell's brother substituted at \$15 the month with the added privilege of collecting \$2 the quarter per scholar, with Prevost making up all monetary deficiencies. Another year "young Talmage" taught at \$6 the month. "I am to allow him exclusively his board. He is to teach

Frances (Prevost) in the Evening the Latin Grammar and admit as many of the family to come to the Day School as may be sent."

Another entry in Augustine's journal indicates he had higher educational standards than most: "Settled with Mr. Webster Talmage for two months Keeping my school and dismissed - a good boy but inadequate to that Situation both on account of youth and method." Early in 1815 Henry Talmage was keeping school for the Prevost children. After the opening of the Greenville Academy in 1815, Augustine's journal indicates the schoolhouse was moved onto another plot of land near the manor house and used for other purposes.

The religious needs of the settlers were not neglected by this patentee. He had earlier given land in Greenville village for the Presbyterian Church, but more locally at West Greenville, the Prevost schoolhouse was utilized for religious services. The Prevosts were Episcopalians and were known to maintain contact with those of similar faith in Rensselaerville, Athens and at Catskill; there is no indication they attended services at East Greenville after the Rundles constructed that Episcopal edifice. On August 10, 1814, Major Prevost could be found writing an order to Messers Swords to "send me 1 Doz. Common Prayer Books - paid." (The Book of Common Prayer, updated, is still the basic volume used in churches of the Anglican communion.) The east wing of the Hush Hush manor house was long known as the Bishop's Wing; it housed Bishop John Henry Hobart of the Diocese of New York whenever he came into the area for the Episcopal rite of confirmation. There is also some indication that Augustine was willing to hold nondenominational services at the schoolhouse, utilizing any available minister of the gospel. On April 14, 1814, Augustine would record in his journal: "Good Friday Kept at our School House - the Rev'd. Mr. Thompson preached - about 50 people attended." Mr. Thompson appears to have resided in the area and preached at irregular intervals. Another entry, that of February 7, 1815; "Mr. Thompson preached in my schoolhouse."

Beers' *History of Greene County* indicates that the Methodist Episcopal Society at West Greenville was organized February 8, 1825 with approximately 15 members ministered to by the Reverend Joel Squire. The framed Methodist church was valued at \$1,500 for insurance purposes; it stood on the northwest corner of the four corners. Services were held on alternate Sundays, indicating it was a shared pastorate. The first trustees were Alexander Calder, Benjamin McCabe, John S. Raymond, Thomas J. Smith, and Benjamin Morehouse. William Coburn was the first Sunday School superintendent.

Again referring to Augustine Prevost's journal for the years 1811 - 1817, one finds a rural agricultural economy at West Greenville, supplemented by milling activities as well as lumbering operations; the latter

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included the making of barrel staves and shingles. In the main it was a credit-oriented economy, little cash being available. Even Augustine was frequently hard pressed for ready funds. Accounts were settled periodically, partially by barter or by a complicated arrangement of debt cancellation among several parties. Except for the Prevosts and one or more of the prosperous families, such as Chamberlain and Reed, the local settlers tended to be self-supporting. Men were not adverse to "hiring out" for a few days to earn occasional extra income.

West Greenville was blessed with water power. The main stream, as its name indicates, was the Basic which flowed in a southerly direction. A smaller run of water nearer the Prevost manor house was named for that family. Augustine Prevost leased the water rights on the Basic through his land at West Greenville but built and controlled his mills, both saw and grist, on Prevost Creek.

Simeon Scripture, for whom the bridge over the Basic Creek was named, as early as 1807 had a house, fulling mill with dam, and other outbuildings at that location astride Route 81. (See Greene County Historical Society's *Quarterly Journal*, Vol. 2, #4, Winter 1978). The mill unit was sold and resold — from Scripture to Kellogg to Bidwell; in 1814 it went to Morehouse and Roe and eventually to Alexander Calder. The Prevosts, for years, collected \$10 per annum for water rights. The mill finally went through foreclosure in 1827 when the sheriff advertised it for sale in the *Greene County Republican* newspaper. At that time it was a William C. Polhamus and Benjamin Morehouse operation. The advertisement reads: "To wit, one lot of land, with Dwelling House, barn and outhouses thereon, bounded west by the Basic Creek, south by lands of Francis Hickok, north and east by lands of Alexander Calhoun, containing two acres, be the same more or less. Also, one other piece of land with clothing and carding Works thereon, bounded on the west by the Basic Creek, north and east by lands of Alexander Calhoun, south by the first described premises of the said Benjamin Morehouse, containing one acre more or less."

On February 14, 1814, Augustine Prevost joined a stock company "to purchase out Bidwell" and operate the carding and fulling mill "adjoining Alexander Calhoun's land holdings on the Basic." His business associates were Jonathan Sherrill, Alexander Calhoun, Amos Botsford and Abijah Reed. It was equally unsuccessful as far as any operating profit. Augustine had invested \$350 in the company; it is doubtful if he even recouped all of that investment.

On the Prevost Creek to the westward (south of today's Route 81), Augustine built a dam, grist mill, saw mill and a pot ashery. He never operated these himself but rather worked them on shares. Millers came and went! For a time Augustine's son, George

William, took title to that property but was equally unsuccessful in its operation for profit.

Some families followed the age-old custom of having burial plots on their own acreage but Augustine Prevost utilized the community's burial ground — Locust Cemetery. This was a plot of land set off from Hush Hush acreage. By the terms of the transfer, Augustine retained the right of pasturage for his sheep. In walking through this cemetery today, one may read the names of many early settlers; it is still used for burials.

Of all the milling activities at West Greenville, the most successful was that at the Red Mills. It outlasted several owners, including the Sherrills, well into the twentieth century. The dam was in the stream bed, the spillway along the west bank of the Basic. On private property, the spillway in 1983 was part of an attractive flower garden in a landscaped area, a credit to its present owners.

With the construction of the Cocksackie Turnpike in the first decade of the nineteenth century, lumber, barrel staves, shingles, as well as miscellaneous farm produce could be more easily shipped to the metropolitan areas. It was still a long haul to Reed's Landing at Cocksackie but there was little other choice. The daybook of Archibald and James McVickar is one of the earlier to have survived. It indicated the Prevosts, and to a lesser extent the Chamberlain family, were customers. Tea, coffee, brandy, cone sugar, cloth mill hardware and books were among the items hauled in to West Greenville. The store of Eliakim and his son, Abijah Reed, in Greenville village, also handled retail transactions. West Greenville appears never to have had its own general store.

By the 1850's the Prevost family had sold off a major portion of the patent. Theodore Louis and his unmarried sisters operated the manor home farm, making at best a marginal living. Except for the Red Mills, the cooper's shop, and the blacksmith's, manufacturing on a small scale had virtually ceased at West Greenville. Like other areas of Greene County, residents were moving out to the westward. The small family farms, however, continued to support those who remained.

In this pre-Civil War period, until 1856, one could still attend the Methodist church near the crossroads; the children were educated in the old one-room schoolhouse north of the later one. Overnight accommodations could be secured at the Marble Pillar, the hotel on the northeast corner operated by the Bloomer Griffin family. Horses and vehicles could be housed across the road in the hotel sheds. Horses could be shod up Ingalside Road.

A study of Samuel Geil's *Map of Greene County* (1856) reveals the names of a number of West Greenville families during this period: Up Ingalside road were E. Wilson, J. Rose, D. Evans, G. Hickok, D. Baker, D. Hickok, D. Showers, J. Arnold, W. Lake

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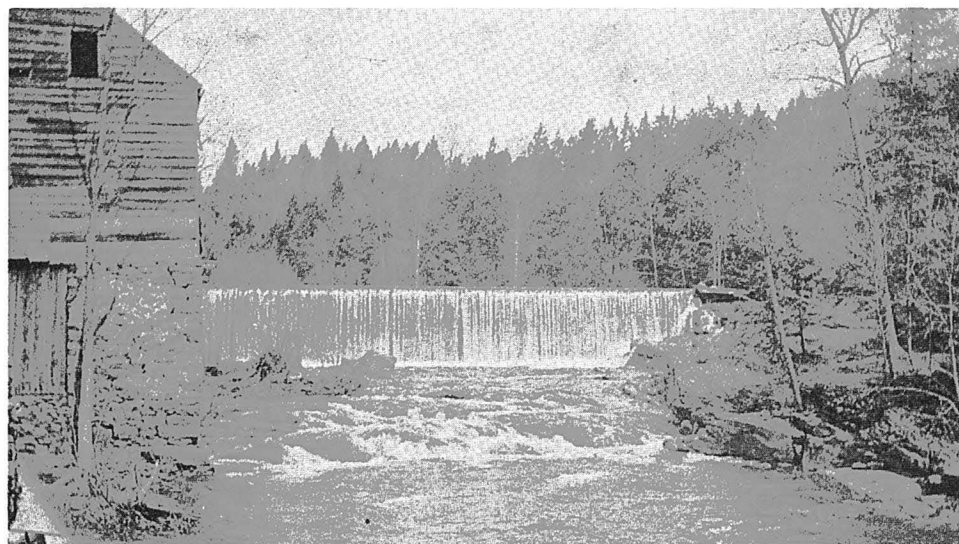
WEST GREENVILLE



*Cutting Ice
on the
Red Mill
Pond*

—
*All photos
from “Bunny” Gundersen
Collection
unless otherwise noted.*

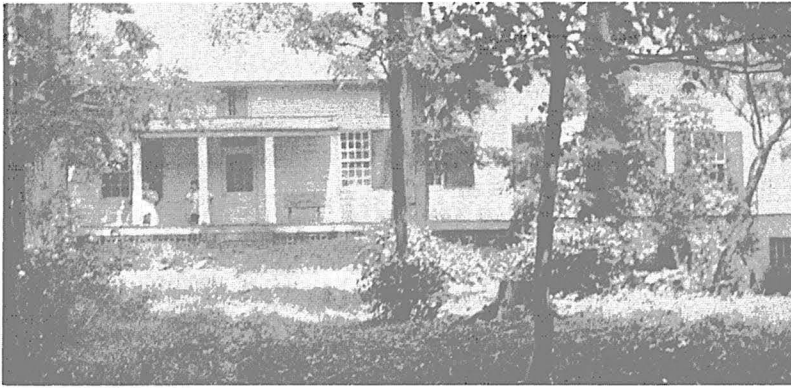
*Red Mill
Dam
on
Basic Creek*



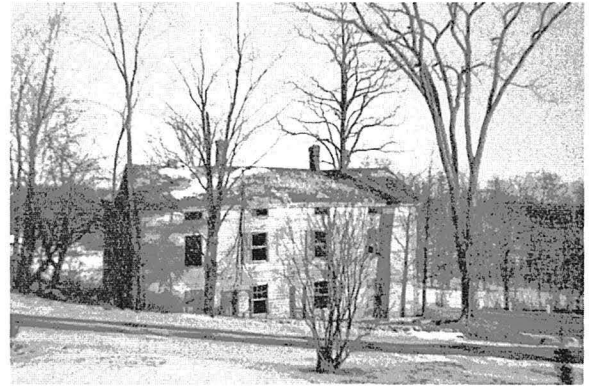
*Saw Mill
on
Red Mill
Road*

—
*(courtesy Gerald
and Annella Ingalls)*

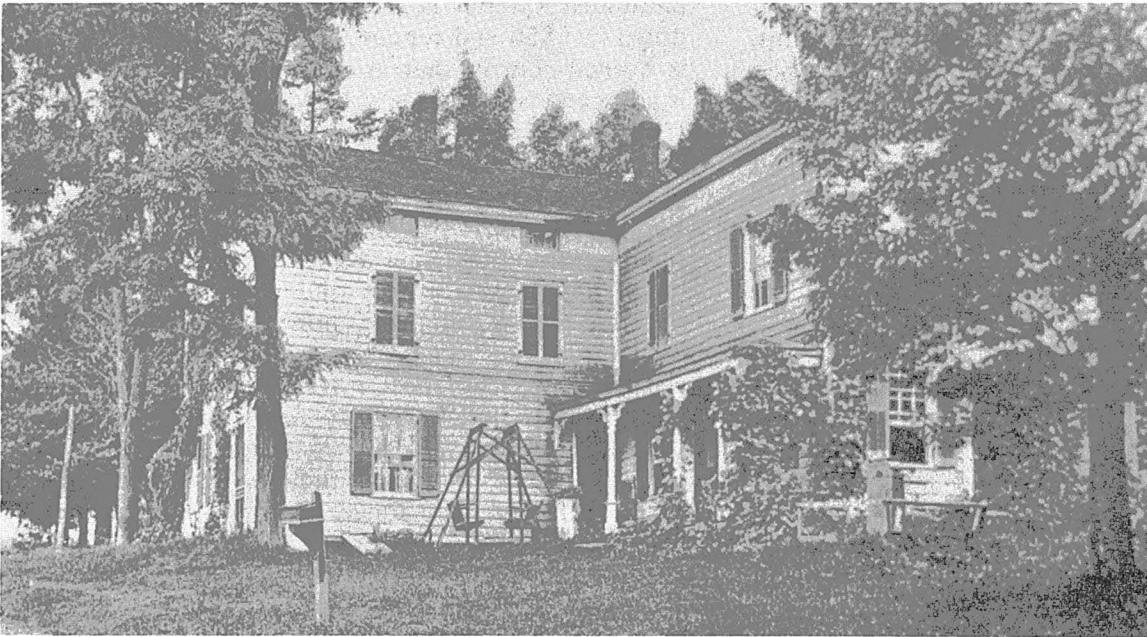
ERSTWHILE MARBLE PILLAR



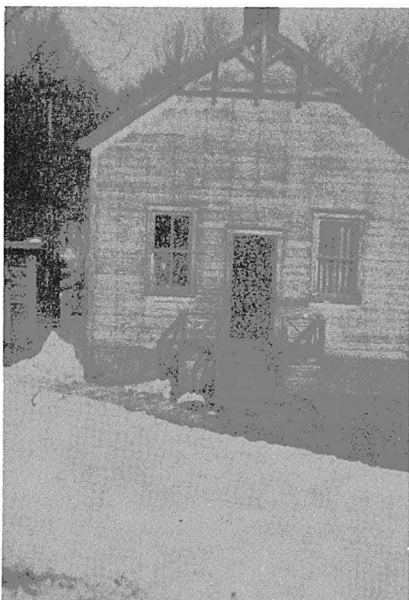
Prevost Manor House – Hush Hush



*Marble Pillar Hotel
(courtesy Leona Ingalls Rundell)*



*Marble
Pillar
Hotel
—
All West
Greenville
photos from
the
Gundersen
Collection
unless
otherwise noted*



*Last Schoolhouse
(courtesy Leona Ingalls Rundell)*



*Abrams' Cooper Shop - Red Mill Road
(courtesy Gerald & Annella Ingalls)*

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and J. Hulsing. For a short distance south on the Red Mill road could be found J. Abrams, Mrs. Hallock, G. H. Rose, Mrs. Chesbury and the Red Mills themselves. Theodore Louis Prevost and a Mrs. R. Williams are identified as living in the manor area. Up Maple avenue were J. W. Collins, L. Hickok, D. Turner, B. Ramsdell, a district school, H. Sayree, J. S. Husted and A. Elliot.

Two nineteenth century businesses at West Greenville deserve special mention. The sulphur spring to be found near the southeast corner of the crossroads was important enough to be listed on Geil's 1856 map. For a number of years its sulphur water was bottled and shipped elsewhere. On the east side of the Red Mill road, not far from the four corners, could be found the cooper shop of J. Abrams.

In the latter years of the nineteenth century a few families began the practice of "taking in summer boarders" to supplement farm incomes. In the spring of 1898 we find Mrs. Mary Joyce and her daughter opening their house at West Greenville and getting ready for boarders.

The spring of 1897 had brought excitement to West Greenville caused by the anticipated building of the trolley line to connect Coxsackie with Oak Hill; it was to run through Greenville, West Greenville, Norton Hill, and on to join up with other lines. Surveyors were active; farmers were planning to cut and sell poles to the company. The trolley line proposal fizzled out as rapidly as it surfaced; automobiles would be the transportation of the future.

The federal election of 1896 created enough excitement at West Greenville so as to encourage the young men to erect a flag pole. "It was surmounted by a large golden ball; underneath was a large streamer bearing the name of McKinley; it was gotten up by some of the young men who cast their first vote this week."

On December 5, 1896, the newspaper reading public was informed that the Prevost descendants had sold the manor house to William S. Vanderbilt. "It had been owned by members of the Prevost family for more than 130 years." In 1898 Mr. Vanderbilt would contract for a new barn on his manor house property.

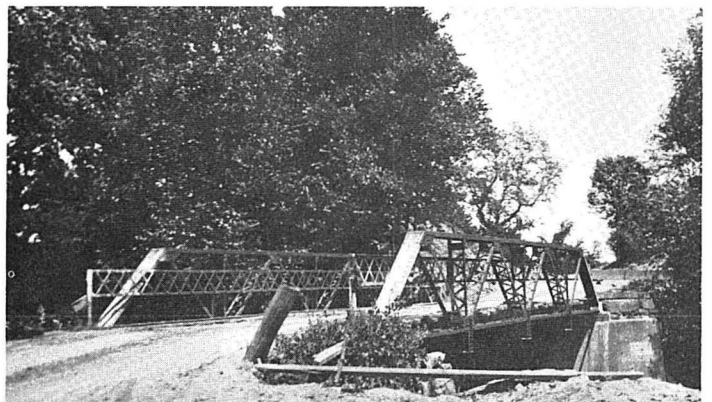
In March of 1898 Mr. and Mrs. John Griffin moved away to Schoharie; Philo Stickles relocated in Norton Hill. James Evans, readers were informed, planned to move to his farm at West Greenville, giving up his stage line from Coxsackie.

The predecessor of the present concrete span over the Basic was an iron one. In April 1898 it was getting a needed coat of paint.

Relatives and friends who had moved away were drawn back for visits. Benjamin Merrill came all the way from Texas to see his sister, Mrs. William Smith. Miss Jennie Roe of New Haven spent a few weeks with her father, Andrew Roe.

In February, 1898, David Evans, one of the oldest residents of West Greenville, employed Oliver Webb of Greenville Center to move on and operate the Evans farm. Unfortunately, within a month David Evans passed away at the age of 84 years, 10 months. "He had been a resident of this place for a good many years. He came to this country from Ireland in 1840, and soon after came to West Greenville. He was a man respected by all who knew him." The funeral was probably conducted by E. J. Hunt who, a few months later, sold out to Ambrose Cunningham of South Westerlo, the latter planning to move to Greenville village that spring.

Today the last mill at West Greenville stands silent; the mill pond dams are gone. West Greenville no longer pays toll on the Coxsackie turnpike. The Methodist Church is long gone, having been taken down in 1856 and rebuilt in Greenville village, where it burned shortly thereafter. The Marble Pillar hotel is also gone, an abandoned building in the late 1920's. If the sulphur spring still bubbles water, few know about it. The last district schoolhouse is now the private residence of Mrs. Leona Ingalls Rundell. Locust Cemetery still accepts the remains of older families but Augustine Prevost's family no longer graze their sheep within the cemetery's confines. Farming is now practically nonexistent. Large boarding houses like Ingallside and Baumann's Brookside attract summer boarders. Private homes line the roads with owners commuting to work longer distances or else being retired. The Prevost manor house has survived, being listed on the National Register of Historic Places. No longer owned by Vanderbilt descendants, it is currently undergoing extensive restoration. The Gundersens live in the restored Prevost miller's house. For all its changes, West Greenville still has a rural charm of its own - to many it is still "West Greenville."



Old Scripture Bridge - Route 81

The author expresses his appreciation to Mrs. Leona Ingalls Rundell, to Gerald and Annella Ingalls, and to Mrs. "Bunny" Gundersen for their assistance in the preparation of this article and for their making available photographs of historical interest.

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A WOMAN'S WORK — J.V.V. VEDDER (1859-1952)
Part II

—Mabel P. Smith

Marriage in her 25th year (1884) brought great changes in the life of Jessie Van Vechten. H. Fiero Vedder, her senior by several years, was a farmer, steady and industrious, but not a social being. He was operating the large farm his forbears had acquired from the Van Bergen patentees in 1774. After Mr. Vedder's death in 1915 it was operated by their son, Harry M. Vedder, until his death in 1964, when it passed to his wife and two daughters, Lois Vedder Scanlon and Ruth Vedder Schmidt.

There was work to do when Jessie came to Vedder Hill, harder work than she had been accustomed to, and not only in the house. She had the care of milk and churning from seven cows, and even more barn work during the four months when it didn't pay to keep a hired man. She said she never learned to milk but, as she described it, there were apple and pear orchards and plenty of other small fruit, and chestnuts to gather "as a time-filler" in the fall. There were also a mortgage and an annuity to be paid to Mr. Vedder's mother as long as she lived, which was for the first three or four years of their marriage. There were also summer boarders.

Mrs. Vedder never ceased to wonder how she got through her first year on the farm. As she told about it late in life it was a glimpse into domestic arrangements of the past. Coming from a home where father and brothers never allowed a water pail or wood-box to stand empty and the coal stove was always taken care of by the men, she was pretty much on her own on Vedder Hill. Summer wasn't too bad, even with boarders, because there were two hired girls and most of the laundry was sent out.

. . . But, in her eighties, the memory of spring cleaning was still painful to Mrs. Vedder: there was papering to be done, heavy carpets to be taken up and beaten and swept outdoors and laid again . . . wall-to-wall carpeting before vacuum cleaners was no joy to the housewife . . . homemade rag carpets, and always the velvet carpet in the parlor.

She learned to cook from the cook taken on for the boarders the first summer, but after that there was a cook with a small child and a bad temper installed in the kitchen . . . and the cook left one day without warning in the middle of housecleaning when the mistress was at the top of the stepladder hanging paper in the dining room. Mrs. Vedder said she came down off the ladder that day to get dinner and after that the household machinery ran much more smoothly. After the mortgage was paid off there were no more boarders.

With it all, however, at Vedder Hill there were compensations: she used to say that "The historic bug" did not bite her until she came to Vedder Hill to live in the brick house of 1729 among the scenes of what had been the first settlement on the lands at "Old Catskill". Even then she never thought of writing . . . actually, she had no time for writing, —

except for news notes for local newspapers, church and organization reports, papers for anniversaries and special occasions, obituaries, etc., etc.

She was never housebound.

She had her camera very early in this century, a Brownie box camera, as her daughter remembers it. Probably the earliest of her pictures which we can date is that of the first trolley over the Leeds Bridge — Mabel Parks remembered her mother making the picture, and that date is easily fixed as November 20, 1903, the date when the trolley from Catskill first crossed the bridge. A couple of years earlier a petition had been circulated in the village to prohibit the trolley running over the bridge . . . probably for fear of damage to the structure. The line was projected to Cairo but never got beyond the west side of Leeds Bridge, to the dismay of its projectors and investors.

This is as good a place as any to speak about Jessie Vedder's enterprise and resourcefulness: as her daughter well remembered, she developed her own negatives and printed her own pictures, and when she wanted an enlargement she made it herself . . . by the light of the sun, out on the lawn at Vedder Hill. This later process her niece, Elizabeth Moore Griscom, recalled for me only two or three years ago (as of 1967). Jessie Vedder had no idea then what a service to the future she and that Brownie camera were performing, even with her strong sense of history. It was the means by which she first broke into print between covers.

In 1915 Mr. Vedder died after several years of failing health and several months of severe heart attacks. Harry and his family, who had been living in the tenant house, then came to live in the main house, and Mrs. Vedder moved upstairs.

Suddenly, she had time on her hands and it was not wasted. She had no training but she had ideas, and she had her Dutch will and tenacity. She learned by doing.

She was progressive . . . that was the word for it then. She desperately wanted for the Sunday School a magic lantern, a stereopticon, the popular forerunner of the projector. The idea of a special fund raised by contributions never occurred to her. In lieu of subsidy she got out her first publication, "The Catskill of the Yesterdays" (c. 1915), a slight little booklet of alternating text and pictures, her own pictures (unless that of the Schuneman parsonage which by the time she was making pictures, had fallen in and burned). I have a cherished copy. I think all of those that went out in her day had a ribbon bow of pink or blue "corset-cover" ribbon tied through the upper left corner. I cannot find the bows had any other significance than just to soften the otherwise rather somber little piece. You will recognize all the familiar scenes: the church, the stone schoolhouse, the Salisbury-Van Deusen house, Salisbury Manor, Leeds Bridge, the Rouse homestead, the Vedder house, the

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Van Vechten house in Jefferson (Snake Road), and the Abeel-Overbaugh house at the Bak-Oven, Kiskatom. Mabel Parks thought the booklet sold for 35 cents; I thought I remembered hearing 15 cents.

This turned out to be a trial run for the invaluable *Historic Catskill*, which came in 1921. It shows no date and by the time concern over the omission arose among professionals in recent years we drew a complete blank until Mabel Parks made one more search and came up with *The Recorder* printing bill and Mrs. Vedder's personal promissory note by which the venture was financed. These papers are now preserved at Vedder Memorial Library, Bronck House.

But this puts me a little ahead of the story. No such achievement as a publication of approximately one hundred pages is accomplished without the application of enormous time and mental and physical energy and, in the case of *Historic Catskill*, it was the result of long accumulation of local material from many sources, including her own family and forbears – and sometimes this is hardest to be objective about. But, also, this was the fruit of a long-maturing friendship with another remarkable woman of Catskill, Miss Emily F. Becker, also self-taught, first librarian of Catskill Public Library and for forty years its guiding genius, with a loyal and sensitive Board respecting her and supporting an unusual institution. But that is still another story: the compassionate and intelligent charity, job assistance, nursing service, sick room supplies, which issued from the Catskill Library before the rise and expansion of public agencies, made fully as great impact upon the community for many years as the books which issued from there. But on another front more closely allied to the usual function of a library, Miss Becker recognized in Jessie Vedder, a woman for the times and in 1916 turned her loose on the second floor where she, Miss Becker, like Jessie Vedder in Leeds, had been hoarding away every scrap of local documentary and manuscript, pictorial, and published material which came to hand or which she could spirit into library custody.

At this period, too, distant members of the Van Vechten family descended from distinguished Abraham, State Attorney General (1810), close associate of Alexander Hamilton in Albany and, like Hamilton, married to a daughter of Philip Schuyler . . . the wealthy Huntington cousins, who had maintained close ties with their Catskill Van Vechten connections, showed great interest in Cousin Jessie's endeavors. They turned over to her an old-fashioned chest and two boxes containing about 1000 packages of Abraham Van Vechten's legal papers! Even the library was not a proper or adequate place to house a collection of such wide public importance and there was then no historical Society and no conceivable place in Greene County to preserve them.

In this situation her sense of heavy responsibility

prompted her to seek advice and to explore procedures, and thereby this Leeds farmwife made the acquaintance of the man still revered as New York State's greatest archivist, the late Arnold Van Laer, whose friendship and respect were hers through the remaining years of his life and service. The Abraham Van Vechten Papers are one of the important collections in the archives of the State Library at Albany today. She didn't know how to do these things in the public domain but she rose to each new challenge and her world opened up around her on all sides.

Then one day in 1920 Miss Becker read that a recent legislative enactment in Albany provided for appointment of town and village historians and Jessie Vedder remarked that she wished she might have such a job.

Testifying to the effectiveness of Miss Becker in the community, the very next week Mrs. Vedder was astounded to be notified that she had been named official Historian of the Town of Catskill. A little later the Catskill Village Board appointed her to the village post and even set up a \$50 expense fund for that office which, she said, barely covered stationery and postage. Miss Becker, never one to quibble over who should do what, promptly fixed up office space replete with table and bookshelves on the second floor of the library to give the newly created posts some semblance of officialdom. A cousin gave her a typewriter and Mrs. Vedder went to work two days a week, traveling to Catskill by the primitive auto stage or with whoever happened to be going to town.

Her first substantial work in office was to gather the World War I records of 500 local men in service in that conflict. And in 1925 Miss Becker teamed up with Attorney Orin Q. Flint of Athens to prevail upon the Board of Supervisors to name Mrs. Vedder Greene County Historian with an appropriation of \$700 which made it possible for her to live in Catskill, and she was eventually given desk space in the Chase Law Library in the Court House. In 1927 the Board of Supervisors financed publication of volume I of her *History of Greene County 1651 - 1800*. After seven years of selfless service, the Great Depression, together with political changes, combined to discontinue the office, a denouement to which Mrs. Vedder was never reconciled.

In 1926 she organized On-ti-ora chapter, DAR. Then, in 1929, at the frequent urging of public spirited people, she called a meeting in the Court House out of which eventuated Greene County Historical Society, of which, with my husband, I am proud to have been a founding member. The Society numbered 280 when the charter membership list was closed on April 5, 1929. Mrs. Vedder resisted strong pressure to become the Society's first president and never did aspire to that office, on the ground that the post was one best filled by a man. Orin Q. Flint, one of its strongest proponents, became the Society's first president, with William S.

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A WOMAN'S WORK

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Borthwick of Cornwallville, secretary. Later she accepted the office of secretary with her granddaughter, Ruth Vedder Schmidt, faithfully aiding her as assistant secretary.

Mrs. Vedder collaborated in 1929 - 30 with Dr. George Halcott Chadwick, an early president of the Society and a notable natural scientist and historian, in a series of sketches which appeared in *The Examiner*, predecessor of *The Greene County News*. Later these sketches were published in book form by the Society (1932), in this way gathering up a great deal of local history which would surely otherwise have slipped into limbo. Aside from many writings in miscellaneous publications of more than local circulation Mrs. Vedder contributed two papers to the DAR Loaning Bureau, Washington, D.C., but probably her most distinguished recognition was the invitation from the Reverend Dr. W. H. S. Demarest, former pastor of First Reformed Church, Catskill, later president of both Rutgers College, which became Rutgers University during his presidency, and of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, to write the chapter entitled "The Church in the Catskill Country" for the authoritative *Tercentenary Studies, Reformed Church in America, 1628 - 1928*. At the age of 84, by invitation also, she contributed a chapter to "History of Seven Counties", a regional compilation.

Nothing that came from the pen of Jessie Van Vechten Vedder was inconsequential. She seemed to have an unerring sense of the worthiness of whatever she expended time and labor on. She dignified whatever she undertook. She held herself to exacting standards and won the respect of scholars and officials for her painstaking labors.

This is a very incomplete and inadequate biographical sketch of this inspiring and admirable woman but if it serves to recall or to introduce her to present-day lovers or residents of Greene County it will have served at least part of its purpose. It has been compiled from many sources, much from my own acquaintance with her in the years of her activity in the various official historian's offices which she held, in her long connection with Greene County Historical Society, and as a much revered older friend, but also from the immeasurable interest, aid and contributions of her daughter, Mabel Vedder Parks, of her granddaughter, Ruth Vedder Schmidt, and from Mrs. William Van Vechten, wife of one of her nephews.

Jessie Van Vechten Vedder brought honor to Greene County and I am grateful for the opportunity to revive her memory.

To conclude, I will append, from her own hand, a sketch of her recollections of the school at Leeds (Madison) as it was kept more than a hundred years ago, written as best she could at 88 in almost total blindness, when she could not even see to read back what she had written, lines sometimes overlapping,

but she was still too independent to tax anyone else to aid her. This was on two sheets of common copy paper inscribed in pencil on both sides which came to my knowledge and were loaned to me in 1967 by Mrs. William Van Vechten.

"Old School House at Leeds"

by J. V. V. Vedder Dec. 20, 1947

(Transcribed 4/17/67 by M P Smith from original pencil writing, signed: J. V. V. Vedder Dec. 20, 1947.)

It is not definitely known when the older part of the present schoolhouse was built but the one at Old Katskill on the Burget farm (later Wolcott, later Schmidt) is said to have been built shortly after the Revolution (1787) and when the Reformed Church in Leeds village was in "an unfinished condition", July 4, 1818, Robert K. Moulton was the village teacher and, according to records, "Orator of the Day", which would prove it to be over 150 years old at least although I have been told the deed for "the land of rocks" was given in 1838 after Martin G. Schuneman's death. [End of page 1.]

I can look back to over 80 years when a small child I visited the school with my sister Martha who went with Washington and Charles [who] were pupils there. I do not remember who was teacher at that time but later there was a Miss McGlashan and Robert McGiffert Sr. of Green's Lake.

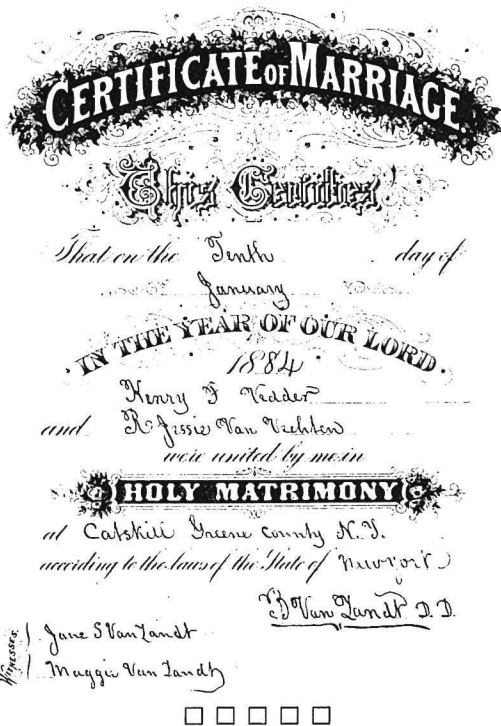
It was a one room school with one teacher and as I see it today had quite large windows with very small panes of glass. Under these and against [the wall?] desks of heavy planks continuous without space between. The seat was the same material without openings. It required some practice for the girls to take their places gracefully by wrapping their skirts swinging like a top to their places. Small children sat on a backless bench by the old box stove. There were charts for these with letters and words printed in black [End of page 2]. These were hung on the wall and the pupils recited in unison from their primers. A small bench held the only waterpail with one dipper for all, in winter often frozen over. The broom was handmade from some farmer's field of broomcorn. The floor was rough and well-worn in spots especially around the stove and there was no janitor. There was nothing but a hand bell on the teacher's desk. Strict silence was commanded and kept by a ruler and a switch. It was an honor to pass the water. I can bring to mind only a few of my sister's classmates - Sarah Ann Holt and her brother Sam (later of the Day & Holt Hardware Co., Catskill). Silvester Dann and Anna Wardwell. Anna lived in the brick house back of the hose company and the Holts in what was known as the Newkirk house, now William Van Vechten's (1947). It may be imagination but there is a dim picture of Robert McGiffert ruler in hand painfully neat in appearance as always. I was never sent to school in the old building but left at Milton Fowks' plow works where his mother kept a private or select school in her kitchen reached by stone steps. Sometime between 70 and 75 years ago there were 2

(continued on page 40)

A WOMAN'S WORK

(continued from page 39)

teachers in the older building, Carrie Jansen and Isabel Smith afterward wife of Stanton Palmatier. The front room was probably built on when the law for free public schools was passed. J.V.V. Vedder Dec. 20, 1947.



SOME INSIGHTS INTO ATHENS' SOCIETY OF FRIENDS —Edith Minerley, Town Historian

Almost forgotten today is the story of the establishment, the growth and the decline of the religious sect in Athens known as the Society of Friends or as Quakers. Their levels of administrative authority were the Preparative Meeting and Meeting for Worship on the local level, the Monthly Meetings, the Quarterly Meetings, and the Yearly Meetings. The Athens group was sponsored by the Hudson Monthly Meeting and those minutes provide a modicum of information for historians.

Recognition on the local level as a "Preparative Meeting and Meeting for Worship" by the Hudson Monthly Meeting was noted on December 24, 1811; it was subsequently approved by the Stanford (Dutchess County) Quarterly Meeting at its session held February 2 - 7, 1812.

On 8-25-1812 the Hudson minutes note: "Athens Preparative Meeting is considering building a Meeting House;" a committee was appointed to assist the Athenians. On 10-20-1812 land for a religious structure was reported and approved. (Third Street at one time was called Ferry Street and led down to the ferry at Coffin's Bay.) Subscriptions for the building were reported 1-16-1813. At the Hudson Monthly Meeting 8-23-1814, the committee appointed to build the meeting house at Athens reported the building completed with all bills settled.

One of the leaders of the Society of Friends in Athens during its formative years was Timothy Bunker. In 1801 he operated a wharf near that of Mrs. J. Haight which in more recent years became the Lenahan shipyard. This local businessman was very active in Athens' economic and political affairs. At one time he operated a pot ashery for the Austin Brothers, then of Hudson and later of paper mill ownership at Jefferson (Austin's Glen). He was one of the incorporators of the Athens Turnpike which was to begin near Market Street and Esperanza Key, run westerly to intersect the Susquehanna Turnpike near Martin G. Schuneman's at Leeds, with a gate for toll collection to be installed east of the Kalkberg.

By 1890 the Society of Friends' membership had dwindled to the point where religious services were no longer feasible. Among the sole surviving trustees of the Hudson Monthly Meeting when the property of the Athens Preparative Meeting was being disposed of were Augustus Angell, Robert Coffin and Benjamin Bedell. In 1890 the meeting house, (the original?) was located on lots 129 and 130 fronting on Montgomery Street. A map of survey made by John Spoor in July 1801 indicates the land was conveyed by Isaac Northrup and Salmon Coffin.

Hester Brooks Haas said the Meeting House at 7 S. Montgomery Street was remodeled into a home by George Reeves; at that time the two front doors - one for women and one for men - were retained but changes were made to the roof. The building is still used as a private home today.

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