

# Greene County Historical Journal

A Publication of the Greene County Historical Society, Inc.

U.S. Route 9-W

Coxsackie, N.Y. 12051

Vol. 8, Issue 3

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Fall 1984

## C. C. WELLS, COXSACKIE PHOTOGRAPHER

—Raymond Beecher

*Interest in nineteenth century photography has increased at a rapid pace in the last decade; it has now spilled over into the twentieth. Private collectors, libraries, museums and historical societies have been alert to the need to acquire and preserve such tangible evidences of the past. This in turn has led to the examination of the lives and the output of the various studios.*

*On the local scene photographs, the work of C. C. Wells, occasionally surface. A major collection was recently acquired by the Vedder Memorial Library from Grant Wells Van Loan of Fort Plain (formerly of Coxsackie). That acquisition had led to the publication of this article.*

*Appreciation is expressed to Grant W. Van Loan, to William Tremmel, to Frances Adams and to other local residents for research assistance. Bill Brust, Canajoharie, is credited with the modern photography work, he having copied Wells glass plate negatives as well as producing other pictorial illustrations.*

*The Author*



Charles C. Wells (1840-1929)

Cabinet photographs, as well as ones for the Victorian photograph albums, ordered by local residents and produced at his studio at Reeds Landing, provided Charles C. Wells (1840-1929) with his primary source of income. His career in photography covered the decades of tintypes, glass plate negatives and pre-World War I techniques. His was basically a one-man operation and, as he grew older, with limited batchelor responsibilities, he could be more independent with his time. He hiked the fields surrounding Coxsackie, rowed up and down the Hudson and across to Columbia County in his boat *Rambler*. Historical events called for the use of his camera such as on the day when the replica of the *Clermont* passed Coxsackie during the Hudson-Fulton Celebration of 1907. Unfortunately, many of Wells' glass plates were not preserved; we can only guess at the quantity and subject matter.

Charles C. Wells was born in the old Wells homestead (thought to be the Molly Wells house) at the furthest reach of South River Street, Coxsackie. His parents were Christopher Wells (a native of Coxsackie), and Elvira Jeffords. He was an unusual child with a definite artistic bent to his nature. This eventually found expression in photography, in poetry, and in art work (pencil, crayon and oil sketches). Wells died at Coxsackie at the Grant Van Loan residence on South River Street; the date was January 16, 1929. Burial was in Riverside Cemetery.

At a time when photography was in its tintype stage, young Wells began his photographer's career. The earliest product of his studio to be located is a tintype of Hester Van Bergen at age 27 years; it has an unusual painted backcloth of railing and a body of water presumed to be the Hudson. The tintype is dated March 24, 1865, and carried the label "Wells and Clough" indicating a possible early partnership. An examination of surviving Coxsackie newspapers fails to yield up any printed advertising.

In his later years Wells had a studio reached by means of an outside stairway at the Craw home on South River Street. The location of two earlier studios is known — one in the upper stretch of South River Street (see photograph) and subsequently on an upper floor of one of the brick blocks near the corner of Reed and Mansion Streets.

A Coxsackie lady recalls her childhood contacts with Mr. Wells. She speaks of him as quite a private person for one whose livelihood required daily contacts with the public. Patience with neighborhood children was evident by his thoughtful answers to their numerous questions. He was a naturalist with

*(continued on page 22)*

C. C. WELLS (continued from page 21)

special interest in botany. Mushrooms and puff balls were among his favorite wild foods; he was alert to the differences between the toxic and nontoxic sumacs. Cloud formations enabled him to predict the weather.

This lady also recalls his last studio on South River Street, "a place of enchantment to a curious

child." The studio room had a skylight. Photos were taken with a powder flash after posing was improved by the use of the rod and head brace to hold the person in a still position. The darkroom, where Wells developed his negatives, adjoined the studio room.

The quality of Wells' photography has stood the test of time – with little or no fading or discoloring.

Photo gift of Mrs. Frank Torra, Schenectady



Young girl, Reed family



Hester M. Van Bergen  
photo by Wells & Clough  
March 24, 1865  
Wm. Van Bergen  
Van Dyck collection



Young boy, Reed family

Photo gift of Mrs. Frank Torra, Schenectady

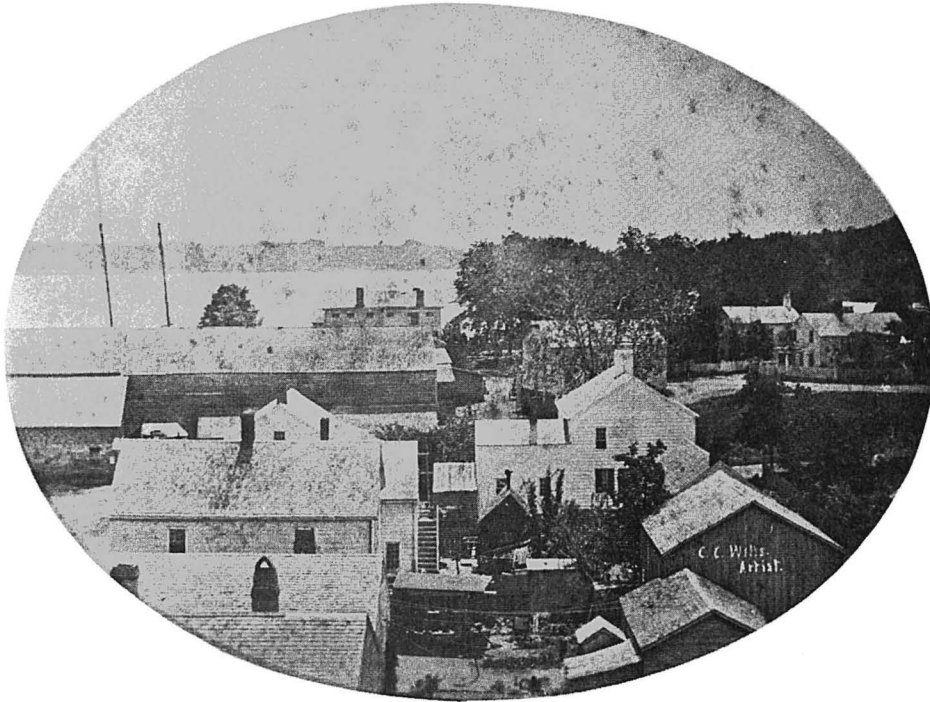


Van Loan family at Adams' Grove circa 1900 (Adams-Grosbeck Estate – Rte 385, Coxsackie)

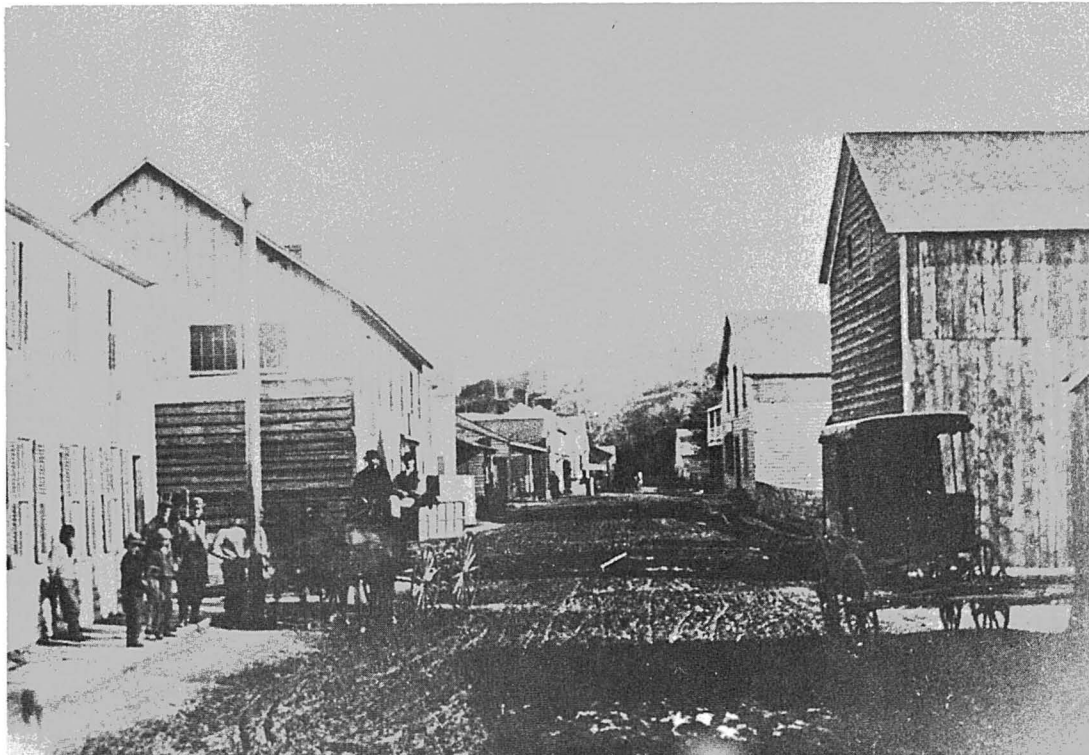
(continued on page 23)

C. C. WELLS (continued from page 22)

Outdoor Scenes — copied from C. C. Wells glass plate negatives



South River Street, Coxsackie — note "C. C. Wells, Artist" painted on shed, lower right.



South River Street, late nineteenth century. Sign above group of men and boys reads: "C. C. Wells" — possibly first studio.

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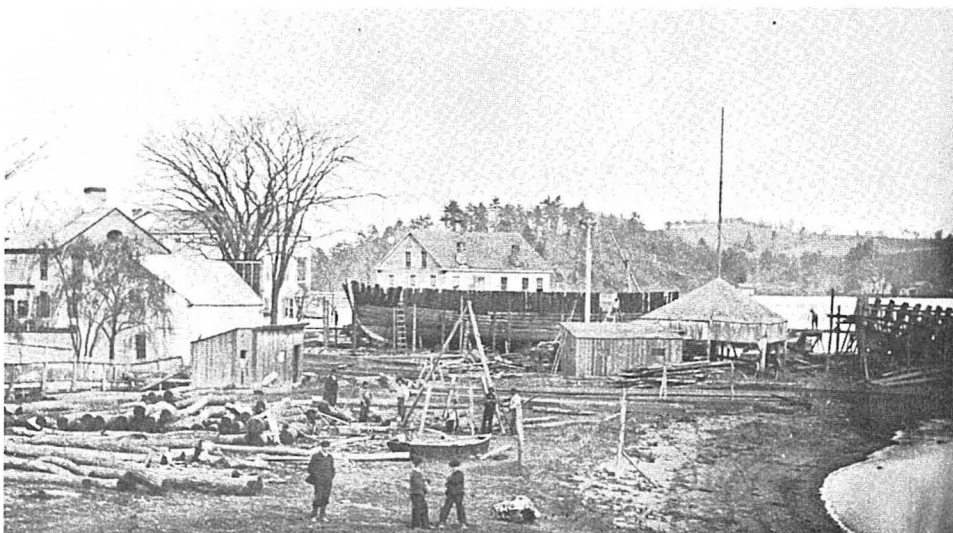




South River Street near Mayo residence — later Cure's Inn, note ice houses on both sides of Hudson.



Foundry area South River Street before shoreline filled in.



Shipyard South River Street vicinity Mayo — Cure's Inn area.



Lower Ely Street,  
Coxsackie—lower  
left—present State  
Telephone Build-  
ing—note yard  
fences.



Mansion Street  
hill, Coxsackie—  
left center site of  
Village Building  
Stackman—  
Kessinger “the  
Homestead”  
upper right  
against skyline.

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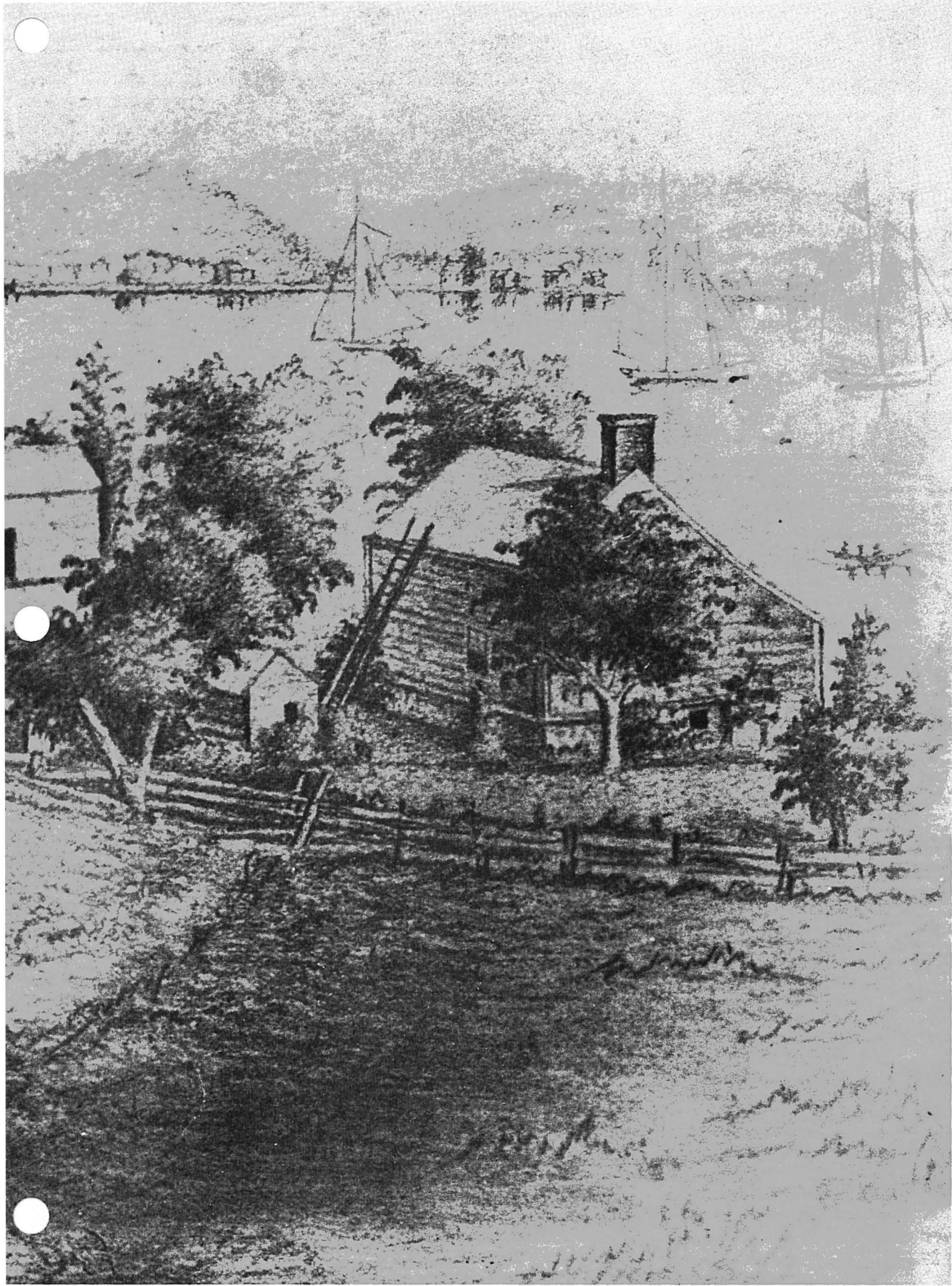
C. C. WELLS (continued from page 25)

## Artist C. C. Wells sketches the Hudson River at Coxsackie

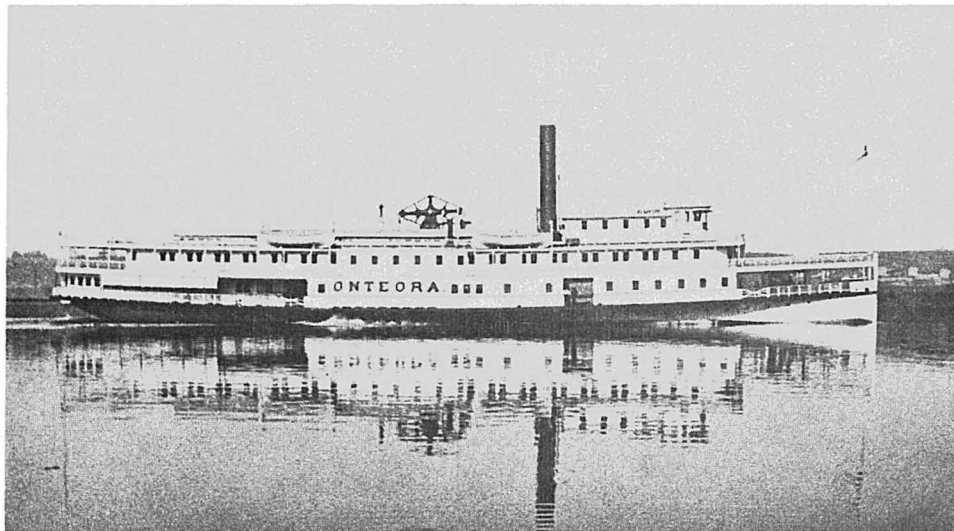
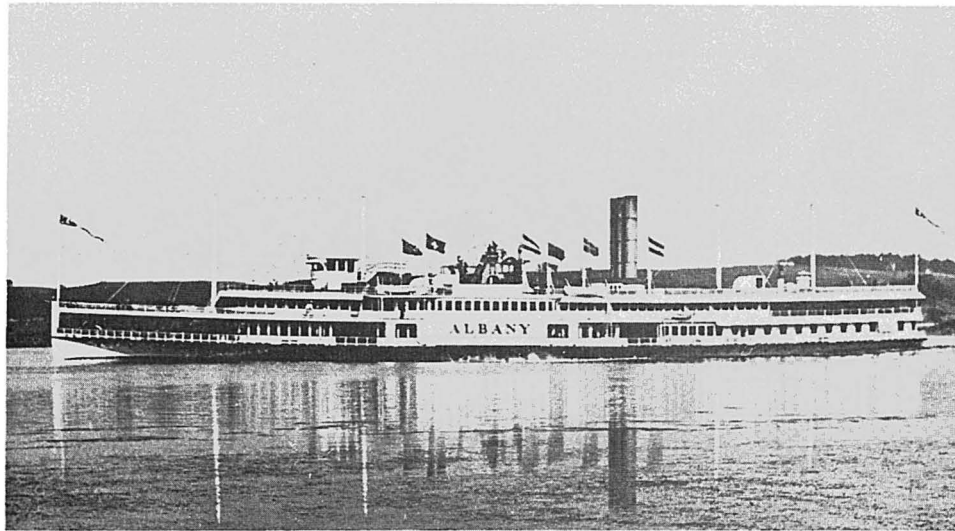
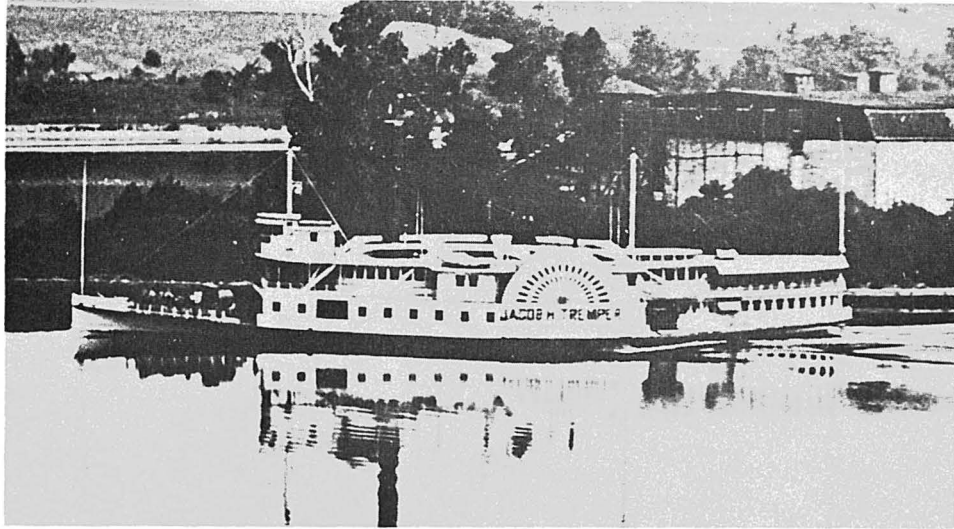




signed: "C. C. Wells, Delineator" circa 1865



Charlie Wells' photographs – Day Boats passing Coxsackie





## VEDDER LIBRARY NOTES

□◇ Through the thoughtfulness of Mrs. Jane Van Loan Erickson, Jr. of Athens, a niece of the late Schuyler Van Loan, a substantial amount of local genealogical material and copied historical documentation relating to the village of Athens is now at the Vedder Memorial Library. It supplements material donated by Mr. Van Loan during his lifetime. Much of the information relates to Trinity Episcopal Church parish.

□◇ The library staff has been working with John F. Page, Director of the New Hampshire Historical Society, to clarify aspects of the life of Henry Ashley (1778-1829). That Society holds Ashley's manuscript journal for the period from 1796 to 1801. By 1807 Ashley was a tanner in Catskill. Later he served the district in the federal congress.

□◇ Mr. and Mrs. John Neuhs, formerly of Coxsackie, prior to their removal to the Carolinas last fall, contributed a framed printed bill form for the Clark Pottery at Athens. It is made out to F. S. Dodge and is dated July 5, 1881. The bill form lists a wide variety of stone and earthenware produced including moulded hanging vases, chemical ware, jugs, florist pots, etc.

□◇ This library has long held *Birds of New York* and *Fruits of New York*, state publications with superb color plates but did not have the two-volume set *Wild Flowers of New York*. Through the interest of Miss Helen Van Ess of Catskill, that set has now been catalogued. In addition, Miss Van Ess sent up a collection of flower prints.

□◇ The Delaware County Historical Association in deaccessioning material not related to their area of interest has remembered this depository for Greene County items.

□◇ An important turn-of-the-century collection of photographs taken and developed by amateur photographer Charles Van Loan of Catskill, has come to this library's photographic collection through the interest of former treasurer, Henry DuBois. The donor, Theodore Van Loan of Bradenton, Florida, has carefully identified many of the Catskill area scenes. These include landscape vistas, buildings, bridges, creek activity and steamships tied up at Catskill Point. A number are new to the Society's collection and will serve to illustrate forthcoming *Quarterly Journal* articles. Incidentally, Mr. Van Loan is a great grandson of Thomas Cole, the artist, and a grandson of Van Ness Van Loan. The Van Loan residence was at 31 Prospect, Catskill.

□◇ Charles Dornbusch, of Cornwallville's Hope Farm Press and Bookshop, continues to send in historical paper material as he sorts through many years' accumulation. The latest includes material from the old Point Lookout, East Windham, prior to the fire.

□◇ To maintain a current file of Catskill Mountain maps, the Library has purchased the 1983 first edition of *Catskill Trail* maps put out by the New York - New Jersey Trail Conference and the Appalachian Mountain Club.

□◇ A strong supporter of this library and the Society itself, Calvin S. Borthwick formerly of Cornwallville and now of New Jersey, corresponds at regular intervals. His father, William S. Borthwick, was one of the organizers of this Society and served as its first secretary; he was president in 1941-42. The Borthwicks were a close-knit family with strong ties to Greene County. (See *Out to Greenville and Beyond - Cornwallville, 1891-1892: The Borthwick Diaries*). But a sad note has come to us concerning the death of Mr. and Mrs. Calvin Borthwick's only son, George, a member of the Longwood, Florida, police department. After appropriate funeral ceremonies including full police honors in death, his body was flown north for a funeral service at Greenville on January 24, 1984. He was buried on May 15 in the Cornwallville Cemetery. His body lies among those of his ancestors dating back to his great, great Grandfather William Borthwick (1810-1896) and to his great, great, great Grandfather the Reverend Bela Smith (1783-1847). The Society expresses its condolences at this bereavement to Mr. and Mrs. Calvin S. Borthwick and family.



A Memorial Service honoring the late Henry H. Werker, federal judge, Southern District of New York, was held at the Greene County Courthouse on May 18, attorney Edward P. Stiefel presiding as Master of Ceremony. Mr. Werker was elected to the presidency of the Greene County Historical Society in 1959 and later served as its chairman of the board.

In addition to Mr. Stiefel, speakers commenting on the life and interests of Judge Werker included Judges Edward S. Conway and Roger J. Miner, Joseph Garland, Dennis Schlenker, H. Milton Chadderdon and Raymond Beecher. The latter spoke on behalf of the Society.

Mrs. Virginia Werker and family designated the Greene County Historical Society as one of the recipients of memorial contributions. To date these include:

Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Mancuso, Saint Simons Island, Ga.

The Shenendehowa High School, Burnt Hills, N.Y.

Dr. and Mrs. Richard Masterdonato, Clarksville, N.Y.

The Greenville Republican Committee

The Hon. C. D. Lane, Windham, N.Y.

Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Warren, Coxsackie, N.Y.

Mr. and Mrs. Meyer Oren, Catskill, N.Y.

Abberley Kooiman Marcellino and Clay, New York, N.Y.

Ms. Margaret Varden, Albany, N.Y.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert McQuade, Coxsackie, N.Y.

Mr. and Mrs. Fred Becker, Greenville, N.Y.

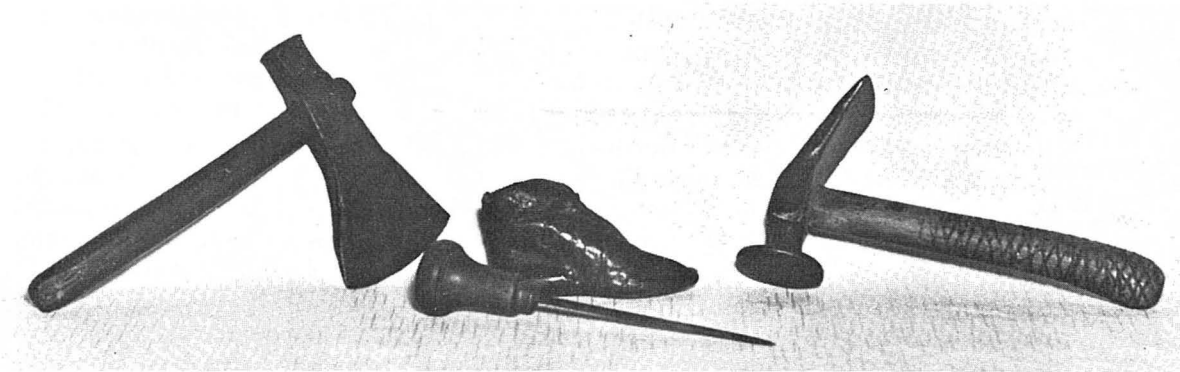
Mrs. Catherine Stiefel, West Haven, Conn.

Ms. Alice W. Poeppel, New York, N.Y.

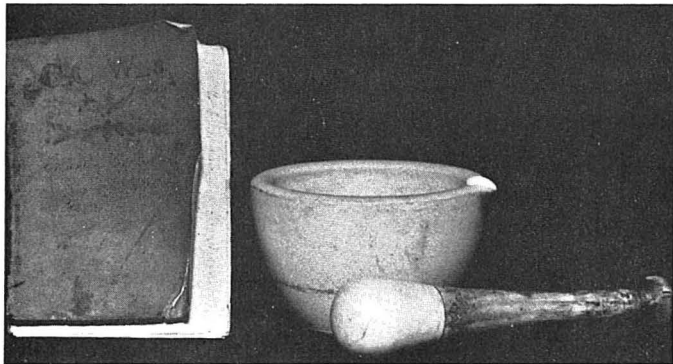
Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Beecher, Coxsackie, N.Y.

These memorial checks have been added to the Society's general Memorial Fund, the income from which is used to maintain the Bronck Museum buildings.





Cobbler tools and hatchet used by Charlie Wells



Wells record book; mortar and pestle used to grind his artist paints.



Violins made by C. C. Wells

**GENEALOGICAL CORNER**

Statement of Federal party potential voters in Town of Coxsackie – particularly in 1815 for the town Election. (Continued from Vol. 8, Issue 2, Summer 1984)

- |                           |                       |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Taylor, Casper            | Van Schaack, Abraham  |
| Thompson, John            | Van Schaack, George   |
| Torry, Gersham            | Van Schaack, John I.  |
| Truesdell, John W.        | Van Schaick, Aaron I. |
| Truesdell, Stephen (Jr.)  | Van Scoy, _____       |
| Tryon, Casper             | Van Valin, Abraham    |
| Tryon, Henry              | Van Vliet, David      |
| Tryon, Peter              | Van Vliet, John       |
|                           | Vosburgh, Barney M.   |
|                           | Vosburgh, Martin      |
| Underhill, Nathaniel      |                       |
| Underhill boys            |                       |
|                           | Wakely, Abner         |
| Van Buskirk, John A.      | Warren, Stephen       |
| Van Buskirk, Richard      | Welch, William        |
| VanDenBergh, Abraham      | Welch, William (Jr.)  |
| VanDenBergh, Henry, M.    | Wells, Aaron          |
| VanDenBergh, John R.      | Wells, Edward         |
| VanDenBergh, Mattice A.   | Wells, Nicholas       |
| VanDenBergh, Peter R.     | Wells, Noah           |
| VanDenBergh, Philip       | Wells, Richard M.     |
| VanDenBergh, Richard      | Wells, William I.     |
| VanDeusen, Cornelius      | Wharton, Edward       |
| Van Dyck, Abraham         | Whitmore, Timothy     |
| Van Loon, Albert          | Williams, Lemuel      |
| Van Note, William         | Wood, Silas           |
| Van Orden, Benjamin       |                       |
| Van Orden, Benjamin (Jr.) | Youmans, After        |

□ □ □ □ □

Greene County Historical Society  
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