

# Greene County Historical Journal

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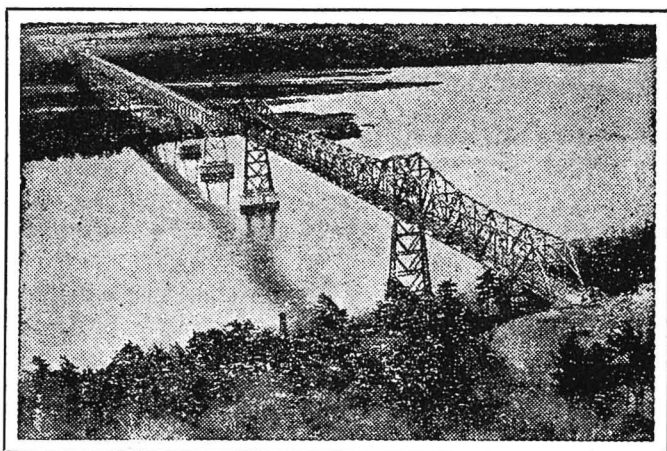
## RIP'S HUDSON RIVER BRIDGE

— Raymond Beecher

Washington Irving's legendary character, Rip Van Winkle, has supplied the name for this Greene — Columbia Hudson River crossing for half a century. Few individuals however know the "father figure" for the bridge was Colonel Frederick Stuart Greene, State Superintendent, Department of Public Works. At a Catskill Chamber of Commerce luncheon held at the

New Saulpaugh Hotel several years before bridge construction commenced, Colonel Greene presented tentative plans of several types of bridges and promised to exert every possible effort to have the river crossing at Catskill. Even in the face of strong political opposition to locate the new bridge elsewhere, he held firm to that promise.

(continued on page 25)



The New York State Bridge Authority  
cordially invites

*Hon. Frederick C. Fiero*

to witness the ceremonies incident to the opening of

the

Rip Van Winkle Bridge

at

Catskill, and Hudson, New York

on

Tuesday, the second of July

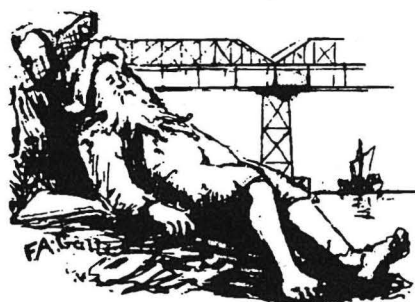
nineteen hundred and thirty-five

between two and four o'clock, P. M., daylight saving time

starting at the Catskill entrance of Bridge at

intersection of Route 385

## HISTORICAL AND SOUVENIR PROGRAM OPENING of the CATSKILL - HUDSON RIP VAN WINKLE BRIDGE



AT CATSKILL NEW YORK

July 2, 1935

COMPLIMENTARY TO  
COL. FREDERICK STUART GREENE  
SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

FREDERICK SNARE CORPORATION  
OF NEW YORK CITY, BUILDERS

Printed by

CATSKILL ENTERPRISE

## THE 1813 GREENE COUNTY COURT HOUSE

— Mabel P. Smith

History has many a pit-fall for the brash one who would label any person, event or thing “the first”. The truth strikes home to one who attempts to neatly chart and relate the history of “the first Greene County Court House”.

Webster defines a court house as “a place where courts of law are held”. By that definition there have been some strange court houses in the history of jurisprudence, and Greene County is no exception. In America, where the very government, from the start, was founded upon law and not on the whims of men, the court house has always been an institution only a little less sacred than the church. Like the church, the first location of a court house in a community was often in a home, in a store-front, or in any other available space. Where there was a school the situation was ideal. It was so in Catskill, one of Greene County’s two principal villages at the beginning of the 19th century, the eventual county-seat.

The County of Greene was erected by Act of the Legislature of the State of New York, March 24, 1800. By Chapter 40 of the Laws of 1801, it was provided “that hereafter the Courts of Common Pleas and General Sessions of the Peace in and for said county of Greene shall be held at the Academy in the town of Catskill, and provided the proprietors of said Academy shall, on or before the first day of June next, grant and convey to the supervisors of the county of Greene and their successors forever, such part of and privileges in said building and the ground on which it stands as shall be necessary for conveniently improving the same for a court house, then said Academy is hereby declared to be the Court House of the county of Greene”. The Academy stood at the northeast corner of Broad and Clarke streets.

I can do no better than quote from a tattered pamphlet titled “Local History Gleanings” by Emory A. Chase with an introductory note which identifies it as “Paper read by Emory A. Chase at the Adjourned Eighth Annual Session of the Greene County Bar Association held in Catskill, N. Y., Monday, April 11, 1910”.

In 1910 Emory A. Chase (1854-1921), a lawyer, had moved from his native Hensonville to Catskill, had been elected a justice of the Supreme Court of the State of New York (1896), assigned to the Appellate Division of that Court in 1900, designated an Associate Judge of the Court of Appeals (1905), elected (1920) for a full term as a member of that august Court. The county’s most illustrious jurist, his death occurred June 25, 1921.

The address marked the opening of the present Court House directly across Bridge Street sidewise from the old Court House. Citing the inadequacy of

space and facilities for safe storage of official papers and property records, Judge Chase revealed the startling fact that “the records and papers of the Board of Supervisors and of the county treasurer pertaining to the early years of our history as a county are mostly lost because in those years there was no place provided to keep them and until now there has not been any suitable and sufficient plan and arrangement for preserving the existing papers”.

When the County was erected in 1800 there were, of course, no county buildings and no place to carry on county business. The Academy, designated the Greene County Court House at that time, continued in that capacity until the new edifice of brick was completed in 1813. The details of that building project were simple:

Chapter 117 of the Laws of 1812 (N.Y. State) provides:

“It shall be the duty of the supervisors of the county of Greene and they are hereby authorized and required at their annual meeting in October next to cause the sum of one thousand dollars to be levied on the freeholders and inhabitants of the said county . . . .

“And be it further enacted that the sheriff of the county of Greene, together with Orin Day and Isaac DuBois, be and they are hereby appointed commissioners to contract for, superintend and cause to be erected in the village of Catskill, in such place as they or a majority of them may deem proper, a good and sufficient fireproof building for the safe keeping of the books, records and all the public papers of the county of Greene; and when the said building shall be completed the said books, records and papers shall be removed thereto and the same shall thereafter be the clerk’s office of the county of Greene”.

On April 27, 1812, the lot on which the 1813 Court House stands was purchased in the name of the supervisors of the county from Samuel Haight and wife in consideration of six hundred dollars. The main part of the building, with fireproof vault, was erected within eighteen months. It was accepted, as required, by the Judges of the Court of Common Pleas at the term of May 25, 1813. The approval bore such prominent names as Thomas E. Barker, Isaac Northrup, Daniel Sayre, John Blanchard, Thomas B. Cooke, Garret Abeel, Peter C. Adams and Luther Carter.

Judge Chase could not find that the county of Greene ever paid a dollar toward the site or for the building of the 1813 Court House except the thousand dollar levy to assure a safe place for records and papers of the county clerk. The specification that the building should be of brick was the accepted requirement for a fire-proof structure.

*(continued on page 23)*



The present Masonic Temple, the Court House of 1813, is the original building on the site despite confusion which arose late in the last century. Beers, *History of Greene County* (1884) and Gallt, *Dear Old Greene County* (1915) both carry the erroneous statement that “A wooden building for a Court House was erected in 1812, which was burned, and a new edifice of brick was erected afterward in its place.

Judge Chase’s research led him to conclude that “The Academy which was used as the Court House until 1813 may have burned in or prior to 1819, and subsequently that event may have come to be referred to as the burning of the Court House”. This seems the logical explanation from information then and now available.

Once the Court House came into existence, as in most rural counties, it afforded a public auditorium and community center which gave a new dimension to life for people for miles around. It accommodated a wide range of entertainment but, also, for many years it was the church home of various denominations before their own congregations could afford to build. Competition for use of the hall rose to such a pitch in 1802 that the Board of Supervisors resolved: 1st. – That the court house in the Academy at Catskill is by grant to the supervisors the property of and at the disposal of the county. 2d. – That the different religious societies in Catskill Landing have an equal privilege in using the said court room for the purpose of religious worship. 3d. – That, whenever there shall be but one minister at the Landing the society to which he belongs shall have the privilege of using the court room for the purpose aforesaid, providing that those societies using the same keep it in good repair and make good all damages which may happen or arise in consequence thereof as aforesaid. October 26, 1802. (deo duce fero committent.)

Once the new Court House was opened in 1813, the cultural and social life of the village was changed, and the impact continued down the century. Traveling savant or traveling clown, each had his day on the community stage.

One who came by in 1815 was retracing a journey of 1804. New England’s restless scholar, Timothy Dwight, followed the Susquehanna Turnpike again and was impressed with the rapid growth of the village, “not a little improved in the number and value of its buildings, and in the good order, morals and religion of its inhabitants”. He noted “many new stores, a court house, and a Presbyterian church, both new and handsome”. On his previous visit he had recorded, “Presbyterians meet in the Court House”.

Rev. Clark Brown, who stopped off in 1804, obviously came from a more populous area and seemed surprised at “one court house and one jail for each county . . . . On the east of the village there is a large hill at the foot of which the houses are built. On its eminence (!) stands the court house and jail (Broad and Clarke streets).

Among the famous personages presented on the Court House stage *The Recorder & Democrat*, December 29, 1865, announced the “Prof. Fowler and Dr. Rogers will give an interesting Exhibition of Electro-Biology, Phrenology, Mesmerism, etc. at the Court House next Saturday, December 30. Prof. Fowler was no less than Orson Fowler who designed octagon houses and read the bumps on people’s heads; and John Rogers, who fathered the ubiquitous plaster “Rogers Groups”, without which no American parlor was complete in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

But the real business of that chamber was the dispensation of justice and to this end five men were here condemned to death: four paid the penalty, the fifth was spared.



(continued on page 24)

## 1813 Court House *(continued from page 23)*

The fortunate one was the earliest accused. It happened in a brawl outside Nancy McFall's house of ill-repute in Catskill in 1807; the victim was John Scott of Coxsackie. With the swift pace of early justice the prisoner was tried, found guilty and sentenced to hang December 22, 1807, but the sentence was commuted to five years imprisonment.

In 1846, Patrick Flynn was found guilty and paid with his life for the murder of Robert James, a drover, in a robbery near East Durham. Within the next year (1847) John Kelly was arrested, indicted, convicted and hung (October 28, 1847) for the murder of Lucretia Lewis, who kept a cake and beer shop near Prattsville. Warren Wood was executed January 20, 1854, for the murder of Hiram Williams, peddler, on the Greenville-Coxsackie road. Peddlers were frequent murder victims, probably because they were supposed to carry with them large sums of their earnings on their travels. The next murder victim was a scissors-grinder Holscher, at Athens in 1873, for which Joseph Waltz was convicted the following March and sentenced to hang May 1. The day before the execution date Waltz's attorneys were still frantically working for commutation when their client murdered his jailor, Charles Ernst, a deputy of Sheriff Platt Coonley. He was never tried for that killing: his hanging took place next day as scheduled.

The Greene County Court House of 1813 knew drama within its walls for just short of a century and still maintains a dignified presence even though eclipsed by its successor at front stage.

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## CATSKILL AUTHOR PRODUCING HISTORICAL VOLUME

As a saver of family and friends' letters, the Van Gelder, Pine, Wardle and Fiero families had few equals. The major part of that large collection has gradually reached the Vedder Memorial Library through the interest of Mrs. Winifred Wardle Fiero. Now the donor has drawn upon these letters relating to the Van Gelders' school and home life during the Civil War era, on the Van Gelder stereopticon lecture tour of the early 1890's, on letters written from Oregon during the gold rush of the latter part of the nineteenth century, and from the Far East during the Boxer Rebellion to produce a full-length volume entitled *Attic Odyssey; Letters Tell a Tale or Two*.

The well-illustrated volume is being printed in Texas and will be available for the Christmas 1985 season. The price has not yet been set but it will be in the affordable range for Xmas giving. More specific information will be released in local newspapers and in the Winter 1985 Journal issue.

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## MEMORIALS RECEIVED

Margaret H. Wilson and Edna T. Anderson, Houston, Texas, have added to the Memorial Fund in memory of Mary E. Van Valkenburgh's aunt, Mrs. Dorothy Darling.

A substantial addition to the Judge Henry F. Werker Fund has come from Mr. Sol Schreiber, Pennsylvania Plaza, New York, New York.

The Dr. Bernard S. Kahn Memorial mentioned in the Spring 1985 issue was from Lucy K. Abramson (Dr. Kahn's daughter), from Naomi Kahn (Dr. Kahn's wife), and from Judith Hilleson (Dr. Kahn's daughter). Users of the Society's photographic collection have a special reason to remember Dr. Kahn. He was the first to alert the Vedder Memorial Library staff as to the importance of Herman Bickelman Sr. in the history of photography in Greene County. Dr. Kahn's gift of a copy of a rare Herman Bickelman Sr. photograph of hikers near the Catskill Mountain House is from a wet plate circa 1900. That gift led to the Bickelman photography exhibit at Bronck Museum and hopefully will lead to an eventual Journal article on that Tannersville photographer.

Frank W. Crandell (1877-1985) had an abiding interest in local history, particularly of the New Baltimore township. The Crandell-Brown roots in that area date from the 1830's when his grandfather removed from the township of Westerlo. With Frank W. Crandell's passing, a kindred spirit has been lost to local historians. But his name survives in an eclectic collection of primary and secondary source materials. More than a decade ago Mr. Crandell began to turn family archival material over to the Vedder Memorial Library. From time to time more came this way. Now, through the cooperation of executor Raymond Greene, housekeeper Aina Anderson, and heir James Nelson, additional historical material augments Mr. Crandell's earlier gifts.

□ □ □ □ □

*On May 30, 1985, Greene County lost one of its best loved citizens. On that day Vernon E. Haskins died.*

*We remember that Vernon often signed his personal letters "Friend, Vernon". We think there is no more fitting title for him than friend.*

*Those of us who knew Vernon for many years remember that we referred to him as "Vernon Haskins, the Naturalist". Again we knew him as geologist, writer and the man who, with the help of his wife and daughter, founded and maintained the Durham Center Museum.*

*But most of all, we remember Vernon as friend: friend of the flora and fauna, friend of knowledge, friend of history and friend of all those whose lives he touched.*

*Be it resolved that this memorial be spread upon the minutes of the annual meeting of Greene County Historical Society held at Bronck House on June 23, 1985, and that a copy thereof be mailed to Mrs. Vernon E. Haskins and another copy be mailed to his daughter.*

## RIP'S BRIDGE *(continued from page 21)*

The first bill introduced in the New York State Assembly by Representative Ellis W. Bentley of Windham on January 26, 1930, sought to appropriate \$450,000 to finance the new span. Reaching Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt's desk, it was vetoed on April 21, 1931. It was the governor's contention it was not the purpose of the state to finance such bridge construction but rather state policy dictated it should be built by selling authority bonds secured by toll revenues. A second bill, which had been introduced on January 14, 1931, creating such a bridge authority, passed and was eventually signed by Governor Roosevelt on March 31, 1932, with Catskill and Hudson delegates present. The official signing pen was presented to M. Edward Silberstein who had long lobbied for such a structure at Catskill. Clifford L. Miller of Claverack was appointed to the chairmanship of the new Bridge Authority; Addison P. Jones of Catskill and Robert Hoe of Poughkeepsie were the other members.

Meeting in session on September 16, 1932, this state body approved the following resolution — RESOLVED: That the New York State Bridge Authority make application to the Reconstruction Finance Corporation for the loan of \$3,400,000 for the construction of the Catskill-Hudson bridge and approaches and the acquisition of the necessary property rights and/or easements therefore as a self liquidating project under the Emergency Relief and Construction Act of 1932 . . . .

Events moved rapidly. The Bond Purchase Contract, dated in the month of April, 1933, authorized the NYS Bridge Authority to issue from time to time bearer coupon bonds (face value \$1,000), not to exceed \$3,200,000, of which the Reconstruction Finance Corporation was to purchase a maximum of \$3,000,000. The interest rate was set at 4½ per cent, payable semiannually on each April 1 and October 1. An exclusive lien on the tolls and revenues of the new bridge and that from the Highland and Poughkeepsie span were to repay the bondholders. Both interest and principal were to be payable at the main office of the County Trust Company of New York, in gold coin of the United States, or equal to, the standard of weight and fineness existing April 1, 1933.

Another section of this contract reads: "After the first purchase of bonds, the borrower [NYS Bridge Authority] will promptly commence, or cause to be commenced, the construction of the New Bridge and will thereafter continue such construction, or cause to be continued, with all practical dispatch, in an official and economical manner . . . ."

As approved, the 13-span cantilever type bridge, 5,040 feet in length, was to cross the main Hudson River channel on the west, Rogers Island on the east,

and finally over the tracks of the New York Central Railroad. The height, 145 feet above the river, was to provide ample clearance for ocean freighters to and from Albany. The Frederick Snare Construction Corporation of New York City, a world-wide builder of harbors, railroads, bridges, etc., won the new bridge contract. It then subcontracted the steel work to the Harris Structural Steel Company. Supervisory responsibility remained with the New York State Department of Public Works.

The preliminary plans for the western approach to the new bridge were a disaster to what has become known as The Thomas Cole Estate (Florence H. C. Vincent, Mary E. Van Loan, and Thomas Cole III, individually and as executors of Theodore Cole and his wife, Eugenia Casey Cole). It was the original intention of the state to acquire, by mutual agreement or by condemnation if necessary, the main house, certain outbuildings and surrounding acreage. The state had in mind a value of between \$10,000 and \$15,000, the main property having been assessed at \$8,500 for almost fifty years. The state further sought to justify its valuation by pointing out that a building site just south of the Cole property had been sold to Henry Post for \$20 the foot, for 78 feet. It also brought up the sale to the Howlands of Cole's Grove 33 years earlier, as well as the Catskill Savings Bank's low appraisal for mortgage purposes. The Cole heirs argued these valuations failed to take into consideration the intangible historic nature of the property and felt \$100,000 not excessive for the unusual character of the buildings. (The Cole main house and the old studio were not declared a National Historic Landmark until 1965).

As the west approach controversy deepened, in an effort to expedite construction, the state modified its original plan. It also hoped to still a limited public outcry arising from the gradual re-evaluation of the Hudson River School of Art. A letter from Thomas Cole III to Frederick S. Greene, dated July 3, 1933, objected to this modified plan which, while preserving the historic buildings, involved a deep cut diagonally across the property from Spring Street to Colewood Avenue, leaving the buildings and part of the lawn within a traffic triangle.

Negotiations continued. The third and what turned out to be a plan acceptable to both the state and to the Cole heirs is summarized in a letter to Mr. Ten Eyck G. Mosher, Albany real estate appraiser, from the Catskill law firm of Osborn, Bloodgood, Wilbur and Fray:

As you may have heard, the State authorities made a change in the location of the approach to the Rip Van Winkle bridge which eliminates the taking of any of the buildings on the Cole property. The approach has been located all to the north of the buildings . . . .

*(continued on page 26)*

## RIP'S BRIDGE *(continued from page 25)*

A similar letter from Frederick Greene to Thomas Cole III, dated June 28, 1933, carries the same message:

I would have answered your telegram of June 26 earlier had we determined exactly what changes could be made in the west approach to the Rip Van Winkle bridge to avoid damaging your property as much as it would be damaged by our present approach. When I first had the pleasure of looking at your beautiful place, I felt that we should make every possible effort to keep from injuring your lovely lawn and fine trees.

We now have a plan which I am sure you will agree preserves all the beauty of the premises immediately surrounding your home. In the first place, the old slave house [Old Studio] will not be disturbed at all, and instead of having a deep cut immediately in front of your residence, there will be no cut at all. All the work will go to the north of what I presume you call the cottage, which is to the north of the residence . . .

The Cole heirs signed the purchase and sale agreement with the state on September 9, 1933. There was never any basic problem with the state's appropriation of the Cole land on the westerly side of Spring Street.

That both the artist, Thomas Cole, and the Hudson River School of Art were undergoing a period of more favorable reappraisal is evidenced by a Catskill *Recorder* article dated January 25, 1935:

The following quotation from the December [1934] number of the Reader's Digest has been brought to our attention by Mrs. Adelaide Trowbridge Crapsey of Rochester, N. Y., a lifelong subscriber to the *Recorder* and a daughter of a former newspaper publisher of this village [Marcus Trowbridge of *The Examiner*]. Thomas Cole's granddaughter, Mrs. Florence Vincent, resides in the fine old English home that was his, at the east approach to the new Rip Van Winkle bridge. Demolition of this house by the bridge engineers was recently prevented by prompt protest of our citizens and sympathetic response from Colonel Greene, the State Highway Executive. It is well for us to be reminded of the widespread fame of the man who loved Catskill and made it his abode. And it is time we provided a lasting monument to his memory.

The article [referred to by Mrs. Crapsey], appeared under the caption "The Colors of Nature" and was condensed from the *Atlantic Monthly*. It reads:

If color is a blessing, Americans need to be thankful for the autumn feast of color, of which the English have little conception. Our first notable landscape painter, Thomas Cole, went to England in 1829 with paintings to be put on exhibition. The English came, saw, and were far from conquered. The foliage of this man's trees was all bright red and yellow. As such a thing had never been seen in nature as they knew it, the critics felt that this was a school of art that needed to be pooh-poohed, and visitors had many a jovial nudge over the young artist's new departure in painting.

Construction materials reached the east side of the new span by means of a temporary narrow-gauge railroad. Some steel also came by barge up Catskill

Creek to the Holdridge dock from which it was hauled by truck to the west shore site. At other times weather permitting, traveling cranes hoisted steel directly from barges to the bridge floor level. During the height of construction 198 men were busy. Only one strike is recorded, that in September, 1934. The men had been earning one dollar the hour for a maximum 30-hour week (as restricted by the labor law). The settlement called for the continued hourly wage of one dollar but extended the work week to 40 hours. The labor law was circumvented by the declaration of an emergency, "steel beams hanging over the tracks of the New York Central Railroad."

The local newspapers kept their readers informed of construction activities. The *Recorder* could report on September 7, 1934, that rapid progress was being made. The Dutch-Colonial style administration building at the Greene County end of the bridge was almost completed, it being just about on the old entrance to Cole's Grove on the river. (See Journal Volume 4, Issue 3, dated Fall, 1980.) The rock cut from Colewood Avenue to the bank at the western end was completed as was the anchorage of the bridge on top of the bank. All the 13 piers were in place. Seven of the individual spans were constructed and plans were now underway to start from the west anchorage to pier 1 and pier 2. At the same time the workers were to work from the east to pier 2, the two halves of that 800-foot span to be joined in the center.

Observers, and there were many, were advised by the newspapers to view the partially erected bridge from such vantage points as William Street and Catskill Point. "The men seem like swarms of ants . . ." As the original steel sections came on site they had been coated with bright red primary paint; the men could be seen applying the silver colored finish coats. Two cranes continued to move back and forth, putting the steel girders in place. "The men would then bolt the steel, being followed by riveters with their trip hammers sending the bolts home."

It could also be reported, at the beginning of August, that pier No. 2 out in the channel, which had given so much trouble getting to bed rock, was finished at last. Poured concrete was drying and large blocks of the highest grade granite were being shaped about the pier to serve as ice breakers. (Piers 1, 3 and 4 had been constructed using coffer dams but #2 required a caisson chamber.)

By November 23, 1934, 11 spans of the bridge had been built. At the end of December 60 men were busy closing the last 100-foot gap over the main channel. That last link was in place by January 18, 1935, the two cantilever arms of the main span being jointed by the use of 16 300-ton hydraulic jacks. It was the end of the subcontract for the Harris Struc-

*(continued on page 27)*

## RIP'S BRIDGE *(continued from page 26)*

tural Steel Company. That firm's workmen had erected the first piece of steel for the new bridge on May 7, 1934, it being for the tower of pier 5 on Rogers Island. The New York Central Railroad tracks had been spanned during the latter part of September. That the work progressed so smoothly was a credit to the Harris firm's superintendent, N. F. Bryan, its foreman, H. Steller, and the resident engineer, A. Krohn. R. Boblow represented the consulting engineering firm, Robinson & Sterman, of New York.

Three fatal accidents and several non-fatal ones were reported. One diver working below the water was the first to lose his life. Then Washborn Markle, age 35, of New York City, died in Greene County's hospital from injuries suffered when hit by a falling steel girder at Rogers Island. His companion, Roger Day of Athens, escaped with bruises. Dennis Clair, an iron worker, while guiding a girder hoisted by a derrick which came in contact with a high voltage line, was knocked unconscious by the 4,000 volt charge. Rushed to the Greene County Memorial Hospital, he amazed his co-workers by recovering enroute. He was a very fortunate man.

A fall of approximately 100 feet caused George Koren, aged 20 years, of Hudson R. D., to suffer a dislocated right knee, a broken arm and numerous bruises. While working on a span west of Rogers Island, Koren lost his footing, and in falling, struck two steel beams. He landed in seven feet of water, about 162 feet from shore, and disappeared beneath the water on down to the muddy bottom of the river. When he surfaced, he started swimming but was greatly handicapped by his injuries. Superintendent Farrel jumped in and succeeded in keeping Koren afloat until help arrived.

John Bibko was less fortunate. He fell some fifty feet from scaffolding above the tracks of the temporary narrow-gauge railroad used for hauling steel. From the time he lost his balance until his death at the hospital 1½ hours later, he never regained consciousness.

Yet, all in all, the deaths and injuries were thought to be below the average for such a complex construction job. "Normally about six or seven deaths could be expected."

As construction neared its finish, bridge dedication plans began to take shape. It was to be a joint celebration with Columbia County and more particularly with the City of Hudson. A meeting held in the office of attorney Lewis Malcolm at Catskill on March 22, brought together Hudson's Mayor Frank W. Wise, Secretary Parks of the Hudson Chamber of Commerce, Editor Henry M. James of the *Hudson Star*, Judge Tristram Coffin and M. Edward Silberstein, president of Catskill's Chamber of Com-

merce. It came at a fortunate time for Hudson which was already planning a special celebration event for the city's founding.

Included in the west shore events were to be a luncheon, a parade, and site activities. Fortunately for Greene County, and Catskill, the Bridge Authority's administration building and the bronze tablet and boulder were at the western end of the bridge. Robert B. Denhardt, chairman of the Catskill parade committee, invited all towns and organizations to participate. Main Street was to be well decorated. The Grand Marshall selected was John J. Fitzsimmons.

It was Francis W. Wardle's idea to persuade the federal postal establishment to issue a commemorative stamp for the bridge's opening. On May 18, 1935, he wrote to Congressman Philip Goodwin on the matter, including in the letter a photo of "Uncle Henry Haskins" posing as Rip Van Winkle. But Washington objected on the grounds it was only a regional event, that the idea had surfaced too late, and that there were numerous other similar requests which had also been turned down. As a compromise, a "first-day cover" was issued through the Catskill post office. (Hudson may also have participated.)



*(continued on page 29)*

## VEDDER LIBRARY NOTES

- ◇ Imprints of Catskill and other Greene County areas are high on the library's wanted list. From the Ben Franklin Bookshop, Upper Nyack, has come Scougal's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. Croswell of Catskill was the printer.
- ◇ Leslie Marquoit, formerly of Catskill and now of Danville, California, has thoughtfully provided this library with a copy of the Sonoma County Historical Society's *Journal* for December 1984. The feature article is "Henry Meiggs and the North Coast Redwoods." Meiggs grew up in Catskill, migrated to San Francisco in 1849 where he speculated heavily in milling lumber and real estate. When his financial empire collapsed, he quietly departed for South America where he managed to become a millionaire for a second time. His twisted business dealings did not enhance his reputation with Californians.
- ◇ Always a loyal supporter of the Society and its subdivisions, Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Coons of Medway have provided local post card views of Cocksackie and Urlton (Earlton), silk badge markers for the Stanton Hill Farmers' Association dated between 1904 and 1925, commencement programs for Greenville, Ravena and Cocksackie schools, as well as small advertising flyers. Included in the latter is "The First Commandment" production at the Second Reformed Church. Among the cast were the Reverend Delber Clark, Dayton Smith, Frank and Erving Albright, Earl Rider, Willis Parks, Charlotte Van Hoesen, Norton Swezey, George Barber, Louis Pantaleo and Ellen Whitback.
- ◇ From Jeanette Allen Jaeger, Slingerlands, has come interesting printed material relating to the Lamourux family of Huguenot descent. She also includes a tie-in with the Carman, Bedell and Garrett families of Greene County.
- ◇ Supplementing earlier donations, William and Jane Van Loan Erickson, Jr. of Athens have deposited Johannes Hallenbeck's Bible and family register, two Day Books kept by William Cook relating to his painting contracts, a collection of tintypes and other photographs, printed views of Trinity Episcopal Church, as well as miscellaneous items.
- ◇ Through the alertness of Douglas S. Thomsen of Oak Hill, a volunteer worker at the Vedder Memorial Library, Volume II (September 7, 1837 through August 16, 1838) of the *Standard* has been secured. The *Standard* was published by Thomas Brogden Carroll and may have been the first Cocksackie weekly newspaper.
- ◇ The marriage certificate of George Lanehart and Sally Ann Crouse, town of Guilderland, Albany County, and signed by Adam Crouse, Minister of the Gospel, is dated 29 January 1842; it now reposes in the Lanehart genealogical file folder.
- ◇ The organizational notes for the Jefferson Rural Cemetery, dated March 27, 1872, have come from Kenneth Van Vechten Parks of Catskill.
- ◇ Icehouses of the Hudson Valley hold considerable interest to library users. Usually documentation centers around photographs. Prior to their relocation in Florida, Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Greene donated a 6½ x 4¼ inch watercolor sketch of the Scott House on the east side of the Hudson River, about ½ mile north of the Newton Hook ferry dock.
- ◇ Paper items relating to William W. Applebee of Dormansville include a letter from friend Hattie at South Westerlo dated December 6, 1883, the 40th Annual Report of the Farmers Fire Insurance Association (Greenville, 1894), post card notification of an assessment of \$3.20 on the fire loss of Mrs. Sarah Southwick, and an 1908 billhead of L. R. Loomis, builder of farm machinery at Claverack, for the sale to Applebee of 1 corn husker for \$122.50.
- ◇ Readers with information concerning Percy A. Whitbeck's New York Metal Novelties Mfg. Co., located at Athens, are asked to contact the Vedder Librarian. The library has acquired a large broadside with illustrations of the metal toys. It is undated but is thought to be from the World War I period.
- ◇ Several newspapers (various places and dates) have been contributed by Mrs. Howard Waldron of Gayhead. One has an informative advertisement for the Hudson River Night Line.
- ◇ At times when the originals are not available, photocopies are a useful substitute. Patricia Morrow, Maplecrest, has provided a copy of the 1915 Assessment Roll, township of Windham.
- ◇ Certain to be a collector's item in the years ahead is the 1985 Greene County Court House Diamond Jubilee booklet with illustrations and text provided by the Greene County Historical Society. Copies are on the main library bookshelves.
- ◇ Photographic and other related material is coming in from Mrs. Richard R. Murray, Virginia. The Murrays, formerly of Catskill, were related to the Day family. The family home was on William Street, Catskill, until it was sold in 1946.
- ◇ The Vedder Library has transferred New York State Bridge Authority records pertaining to the purchase of the Bear Mountain Bridge to NYS, to the State Archives.
- ◇ Clifton Bogardus Jr., Massapequa, New York, has developed certain lines of descent of the Bogardus family. Copies of his detailed research were mailed to this library for general use.
- ◇ A carload of genealogical magazines, including copies of the *Connecticut Nutmeg*, the NY G & B publication, etc. arrived courtesy of Mrs. Evelyn Richardson, New Britain, Connecticut. She has been and still is an indefatigable researcher on DeFrates, Lampmans and Winns.
- ◇ The Vedder Memorial Library is being listed in the World Guide to Libraries under the Special Research Library classification.

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**RIP'S BRIDGE** (continued from page 27)

As the Corbetta Construction Company was pouring the last of the concrete, the official opening date of July 2 was getting nearer and nearer. It was George W. Williams of East Durham, a state road engineer, who provided the natural boulder on which was affixed the bronze tablet. (This may be seen today near the toll booths.)

And July 2 eventually arrived. The luncheon, parade and bridge site festivities drew over 7,000 persons and required all the expertise of the village police, the sheriff's department and the NYS Police to unravel several traffic jams. The route of parade march, with 50 official cars, formed on upper Main Street (officials joined at the Saulpaugh Hotel). Grand Marshall Fitzsimmons led the parade down Main Street to Bridge, over to Broome, then counter-marched to Main, to Greene, to Broad, to King, to Liberty, to Spring, to the approach to the new bridge. Bands, floats (including Rip Van Winkle), drum corps, lodges, military and fire companies were all part of the day's scene.

At approximately 3 p. m. the dedication ceremony commenced with Governor Herbert H. Lehman and other officials on the platform. The speeches were broadcast over station WGY. The first remarks were made by Bridge Authority Chairman Clifford L. Miller. He was followed by Colonel F. S. Greene and by State Senator William T. Byrne. Governor Lehman's informal speech dwelt on the anticipated growth for the Catskill region with improved access over the Rip Van Winkle bridge.

Following the speeches the ribbon-cutting honors were performed by Mrs. Frederick S. Greene for the Greene County side of the new structure while the Columbia County one was carried out by Laura Carter Miller. Officials and the public joined in a motor cavalcade across the new bridge. Mrs. Winifred Fiero recalls her husband and family being in that group, Frederick Fiero being a member of the Catskill School Board. Unfortunately Mr. Fiero had forgotten to "fill up" beforehand. As they joined the procession, he noted the gasoline gauge was on empty. The Fieros had a few uncomfortable minutes expecting to run out of fuel on the bridge but fortunately they made it all the way. Approximately 3,000 cars moved over the bridge during the "free hours."

The first car to pay toll charges, which commenced at 6 p. m. of that day, carried the license number 8F8432. The car was owned by Claude Speenburgh of Catskill. He drove over the bridge from Columbia County. Traveling from Greene County eastward was car licensed as NYD1204. The first toll collected from a commercial truck was owned by the Trojan Ice Cream Company.

The Schedule of Tolls was divided into two main classes — single and commutation. Passenger automobiles were charged eighty cents for car and driver, with an additional ten cents for passengers until the maximum of one dollar was reached. Light trucks were subject to a toll charge of one dollar or under while heavier ones ranged from one dollar to one dollar and a half. Motorcycles were assessed twenty cents unless they had a sidecar which raised the toll to thirty-five cents. The lowest charge was for pedestrians and bicycles — ten cents each. Provision in the rate schedule was even made for one and two horses pulling wagons. Commutation books of tickets were also placed on sale at prices between three dollars and fifty cents and fifteen dollars. The number of crossings ranged from ten to sixty-two; the booklets were issued for time periods ranging from fifty days to one year. It was a complicated toll schedule for collectors but was in effect when motorized travel was lighter than in the current era.

(continued on page 30)

The Catskill Chamber of Commerce  
 Invites You To Attend The Opening of—

**The Rip Van Winkle Bridge**  
 Between Cats-kill and Hudson

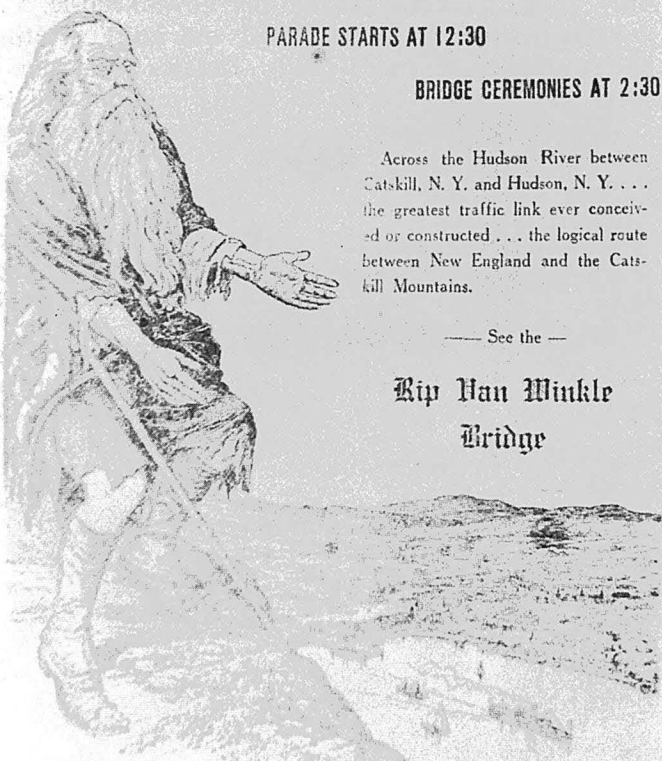
**TUESDAY, JULY 2, 1935**

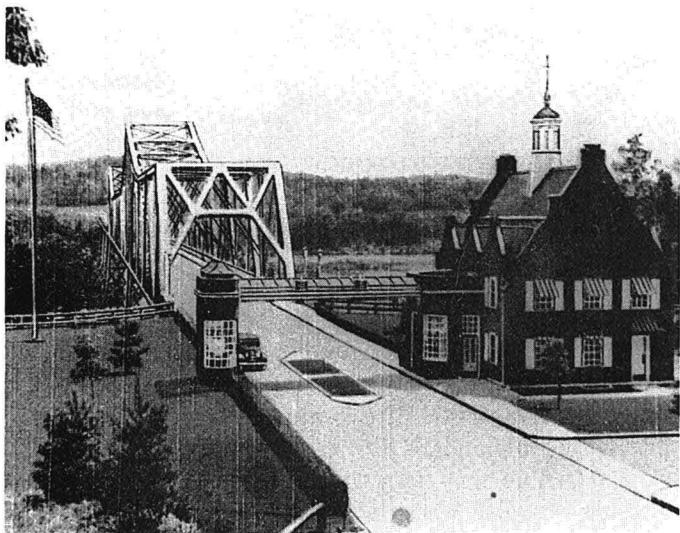
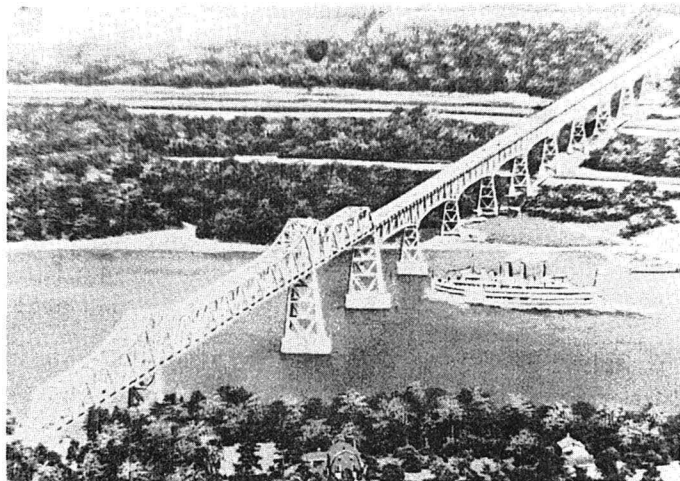
PARADE STARTS AT 12:30  
 BRIDGE CEREMONIES AT 2:30

Across the Hudson River between Catskill, N. Y. and Hudson, N. Y. . . . the greatest traffic link ever conceived or constructed . . . the logical route between New England and the Catskill Mountains.

— See the —

**Rip Van Winkle Bridge**





Over 400 persons applied for the Civil Service position of toll collector, it being the time of the Great Depression of the 1930's. High on the Civil Service list were Edward Burns of Albany, Charles A. Wardle of Catskill, Lamb W. Reedy of Hoosick Falls, W. H. Schunk of Hudson, Philip Dinerstein of Poughkeepsie, H. F. Crosgrove of Newburgh and W. H. Green of Claverack. James Maguire of Catskill received the appointment of bridge maintenance foreman while Dennis Border of Cohoes was named senior account clerk or cashier.

The opening of the Rip Van Winkle bridge on July 2, 1935 signalled the commencement of day and night river crossings. No longer were travelers dependent upon ferry schedules and hurrying for the last trip of the evening. Travel time to Buffalo was shortened by approximately two hours for those individuals using the bridge. While the new bridge crossing signalled "progress", it was a sad period for the three ferry crossings (Coxsackie to Newton Hook, Athens to Hudson and Catskill to Greendale). Traffic on the steam ferries continued to dwindle as the Rip Van Winkle bridge siphoned off paying customers. All three ferry lines sooner or later closed down, being uneconomical to operate with the decreased traffic.

Some minor changes at the bridge site have occurred in the half century of operation. The toll booths have been expanded to facilitate the more rapid flow of traffic. The Dutch-Colonial brick building at the western approach no longer serves as the headquarters for the NYS Bridge Authority. Tolls have been modified, even to collecting only from west to east. The Rip Van Winkle is no longer the only bridge between Albany and Poughkeepsie. Yet it remains basically as designed and built, meeting half a century of travel needs. Today's replacement cost would be in excess of eighty million dollars.

*(Bridge photography courtesy Robert Stackman)*

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