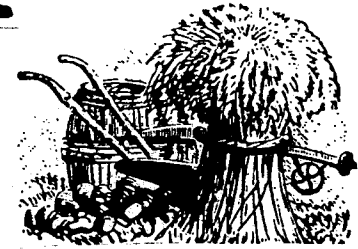


# FLY CREEKER



NEWSLETTER OF THE

FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
P.O. Box 124, Fly Creek, NY 13337



VOLUME 3, ISSUE 1 \* WINTER, 1991

Editor: Bill Deane. Associates: Carol Mezger, Paula Schaeffer.

## 1991 MEETINGS SCHEDULED



Bring out your 1991 calendar and mark down the dates for this year's meetings of the Fly Creek Area Historical Society (FCAHS): January 23, February 27, March 27, April 24, May 22, June 26, July 24, August 28 (annual meeting), September 25, and October 23. The November meeting is tentatively scheduled for the 20th, so as not to conflict with Thanksgiving eve, and there will be no meeting in December. All meetings are held at 7 P.M. at the Fellowship Hall of the Fly Creek United Methodist Church.

The January meeting will feature guest speaker Willis Monie, on the topic of collecting and evaluating old books. In February, Robert Banta will discuss the growing of hops, once this area's major agricultural product. Plans for the March meeting call for a speaker on the subject of preserving buildings.

Two FCAHS meetings have been held since publication of the last Fly Creeker. On October 24, 1990, attendees were treated to a 65-minute videotape of the Fly Creek area and its recent bicentennial celebration activities, taken by Philip W. Bresee. On November 28, two oral history audio-tapes were played: an interview with Ray and Mary Eldred, by Sally Rezen, and one with Frances Saxton Martin, by Peter and Dorothy Martin. Frances lived in Fly Creek Valley c. 1904-11, and the Eldreds have lived in Fly Creek since 1921.

## NEWS BRIEFS



\* An error in the Autumn 1990 Fly Creeker resulted in new member Walter Block's name being misspelled (sorry, Walter). And, the "Anonymous Historian" feature in the same issue listed early area settlers named William Jarvis and Abraham Martin; some of our less-anonymous historians inform us that the correct surnames are "Jervis" and "Marvin".

\* B. J. O'Neill donated to the FCAHS a board removed from his barn, containing the following pencilled inscription: "Henry Babcock, builder. Barn built September 1893. The first time that a car crossed the road by Henry's house was the 25 day of June 1902."

\* The FCAHS is grateful to the New York State Historical Association for its recent help in restoring and preserving two of our historical artifacts: the 1898 friendship quilt, and an advertising poster for Otsego Fork Mills, which was founded in Fly Creek in 1842 before moving to Pennsylvania.

\* Final reminder: membership renewal dues were due on August 22, 1990. As provided in our Constitution and By-Laws, members in arrears after February 22, 1991 shall be dropped from the membership. Applications have appeared in each of the past two issues.

\* Scottie Baker is chairperson of the FCAHS Library Committee.

\* The Newsletter Committee will meet sometime in March. Anyone interested in participating should contact the Editor.

## TROLLEYING THROUGH FLY CREEK

The November 1989 FCAHS meeting featured a very interesting slide presentation on the trolley passenger system which ran through Fly Creek for more than 30 years. David F. Nestle's 1959 booklet, The Leatherstocking Route, provides many additional details about the system, including several anecdotes (summarized herein) involving Fly Creek.

The trolley line began in Oneonta in 1888, and officially reached Cooperstown on September 28, 1901. Progress on the northward extension was commenced rapidly thereafter, reaching Richfield Springs by 1902, and continuing on to Mohawk. Passenger service ended in 1933, and the tracks were scrapped in 1941.

One humorous bit of trolley folklore involved a lengthy wait at Fly Creek, caused by a derailment, during a heavy downpour of rain on October 6, 1902. One passenger, it is said, suddenly awakened from sleep and, concluding he had reached home, attempted to disrobe and make his couch in a nearby meadow.

On March 24, 1905, Car 16 jumped the track north of Fly Creek while speeding along at the rate of 20 MPH. It bounced over the ties for 50 feet, finally turning over on its side. Conductor Buell was the only casualty, making a jump when the trouble began and suffering a broken shoulder.

A Mr. Jones of Fly Creek was killed by the trolley in 1929. While walking in Cooperstown, he was pinned between the train and some trees, and crushed to death.

Fly Creek's claims to notoriety in the history of the trolley system are the Mud and Chalk lakes, just south of Route 28/80. Plans called for the trolley track to cross these little ponds, but construction proved to be quite a problem. Unbeknownst to the planners, the swamp had once been a 50-foot deep body of water which had been filled due to the erosion of its feeder streams, causing a "bottomless pit" effect. For days men labored to fill the bogs only to return every morning to find ties and rails suspended in air minus roadbed. For a time piling was tried but found unsatisfactory. After the contractor had depleted all funds on this project, the idea was abandoned and track was laid around the bogs. These detours created dangerous curves and delayed schedules.

Another attempt to fill the bog at Mud Lake was undertaken in 1906. Over 18,000 cubic yards of earth were hauled and dropped into the pond. The electric locomotive was nearly lost in November, 1906, while it was hauling cars of fill out over the newly-constructed roadbed. The weight of the locomotive and cars caused the fill beneath to settle quickly and, if not for the quick work of the motorman, the engine and cars would have become part of the fill. A few days later a flat car broke loose and came tearing down the track, causing the laborers to take leg bail into the swamp for their very lives. No injuries resulted, but most of the laborers left in disgust on the next car.

Finally the bog was filled. It is said that an obsolete steam locomotive tender was toppled into the mass, along with an obsolete power-house boiler and other old equipment and rubble, to help strengthen the roadway. Other amounts of fill were later added as sections settled, costing over \$12,000 in 1917 alone. At last, the right-of-way became passable, although a slight tremor was perceptible when a car passed over the fill.



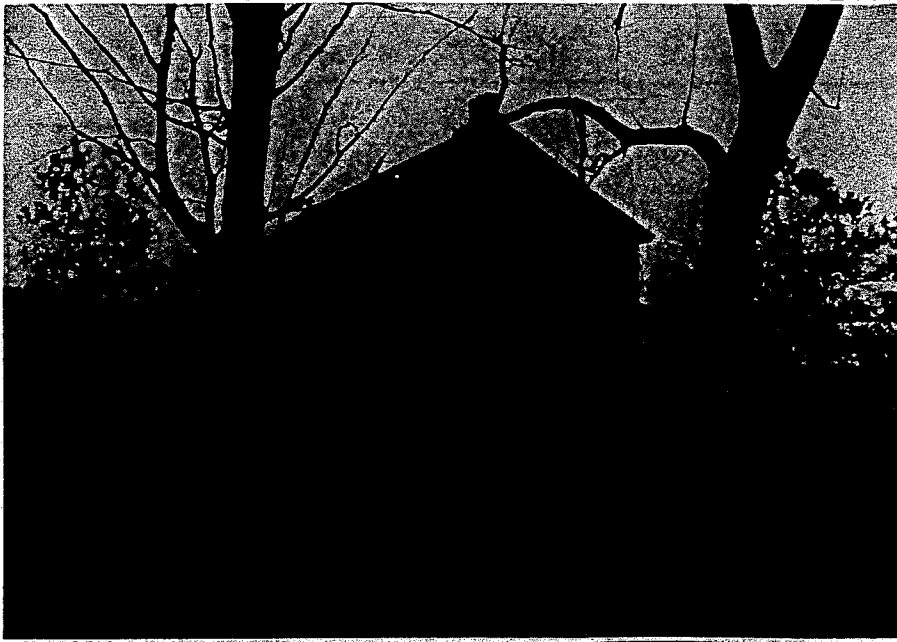
# Fly Paper

by Tom Heitz

(Editor's Note: Tom Heitz is the contributor of "Bound Volumes", a weekly historical column in the Cooperstown Freeman's Journal. The column reprints articles from the Journal dating back 25, 50, 75, 100, and 150 years. In the course of his research, Mr. Heitz occasionally comes across Fly Creek area news tidbits. He has volunteered to share these with us here in a semi-regular column, of which this is the first installment.)

FEBRUARY 16, 1916-- Fly Creek is to have electric lights. A meeting of the Board of the Town of Otsego passed a resolution Monday afternoon by a vote of 5 to 1 granting the petition of certain taxpayers of Fly Creek. Jas. J. Byard, Dr. J. B. Horle, George L. Turner, Frank Allison and Ceylon Ferns were appointed a committee of five to confer with a representative of Collier's Light, Heat and Power Co. as to the placing of poles and details of the lighting district. At an informal meeting held at the Grange Hall, Fly Creek, Saturday, February 8, some 30 taxpayers heard Mr. Stone, General Manager of the O & H Railroad Co. explain the proposed lighting system in detail. An informal ballot resulted in 14 votes against installation and 12 for.

FEBRUARY 23, 1916-- Fly Creek is soon to have a new industry, a cheese factory and pasteurizing plant. A representative of the H. W. Bell Co. of New York City, builders and equippers, has been at that place the last week and as a result of his efforts subscriptions to the stocks in the sum of \$6,900 have been secured. The first meeting of the stockholders took place on Thursday and John B. Hooker, H. F. Jones and C. C. Ferns were appointed a committee to purchase the site for the building.



THE BYARD HOME

The Byard home, once considered the "showplace of Fly Creek", was located just south of the current Fire House on County Road 26. In its heyday it featured manicured lawns and tennis courts but, in recent years, it was just a curious vacant shack. The house collapsed in June, 1990, and the remains were levelled shortly after. A letter from a Byard descendant (see back page) helps explain the story.

## OBITUARY

Elizabeth "Betty" Susman died suddenly at her Fly Creek home on November 1, 1990. She was 82.

Born in Little Falls, NY August 13, 1908, she worked as a registered nurse at Little Falls Hospital and at Bassett Hospital until her retirement. She was an active member of the Fly Creek United Methodist Church, the United Methodist Women, and the FCAHS, and was an American Red Cross Bloodmobile volunteer.

We extend our condolences to Betty's husband of 60 years, Paul Susman, and to the rest of her family, which includes two children, four grandchildren, and several nieces and nephews.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



The Fly Creeker will print letters of general interest about the Society or the newsletter itself. Please address all correspondence to the Editor, Bill Deane, at P.O. Box 47, Fly Creek, NY 13337.

"I am a professional genealogist specializing in Otsego County... This past summer I had occasion to trace a family named Scott living (1850) near the corner of Johnston Road and Route 28. At that time I found out there was once a cemetery at the northeast corner of that crossroads. It is noted on a "quad" map made in the 1930s. In your research I hope you will be able to discover what happened to the stones in this cemetery and the date it ceased to exist... Good luck in your research and let me know if I can be of help in any way." (Can anyone supply an answer to Mrs. Ulrich's question?--Ed.)

Constance R. Ulrich  
P.O. Box 1028, Gulf Breeze, FL 32562

"The Byard house (see article elsewhere in this issue) was my grandparents' house and the site of many pleasant visits during my and my sister's childhood. The house was sold many, many years ago... unfortunately to a man who, shortly after the sale, we believe, was confined to an asylum and unable or unwilling to maintain or repair the house in any way to slow up its decay."

Spencer Byard  
New York, NY

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