

# *Fly Creeker*

NEWSLETTER of the FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY (FCAHS)

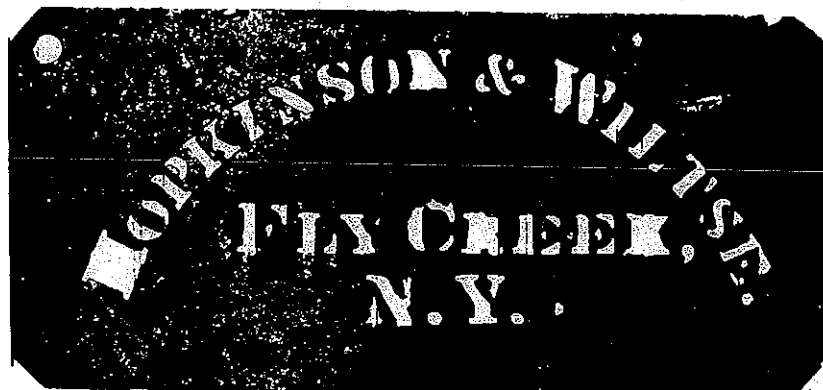
Editor: Bill Deane, P.O. Box 47, Fly Creek, NY 13337; 607- 547-5786; e-mail, DizDeane@aol.com

Assistants: Jim Atwell, George Badgley, Carolyn McLean.

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## NEWS BRIEFS

- **Almost a century ...** Hattie R. Devenpeck, a member of the FCAHS from 1989-96, died January 25, 1998, aged 96 years, 10 months. A former Toddsville resident, Mrs. Devenpeck thus joins the list (last published here in Spring, 1997) of longest-lived area residents. Only seven are known to have outlived her: Elvira Bourne, Dora Winnie, Ray Eldred, Emily Pickens, Mary Eldred, Leander Weldon, and Orlando Bourne.
- **Fallen star ...** Apologies to George & June Wyckoff, charter members who were not identified as such in the last newsletter. The editor forgot to asterisk their names.
- **Fly Creeker index ...** The editor has updated the index to the *Fly Creeker*. It now runs six pages and is complete through 1997, covering our first 34 issues. Anyone interested in receiving a copy may do so by sending a long self-addressed, stamped envelope to the editor.
- **Modern communication ...** Readers may submit articles, items, letters, ideas, or criticism to the *Fly Creeker* by mail, telephone, or even e-mail. Contact information is in the masthead, above.
- **No taxation ...** President Jim Atwell reports that the FCAHS has gained tax-exempt status, meaning that our organization is exempt from paying New York State sales tax. Our application for federal tax exemption is still pending.
- **An event near and Deere to us ...** On September 12-13, Fly Creek will host its first annual Antique Tractor Festival. A pancake breakfast, benefiting the Society, will be held at the church that Saturday. Stay tuned for further details on this FCAHS fund-raiser.
- **Final reminder ...** Annual dues for 1998 were due by the first of the year, and this is the last newsletter being mailed to those who aren't up to date. If you weren't included among the paid-up members listed in the last two newsletters, please use the application on the bottom of page 3 to renew your membership. Thank you.
- **Hopkinson & Wiltse ...** Pictured below is an artifact recently donated to the Society. It depicts a copper stencil, measuring approximately 4-3/4 by 10 inches. Does anyone know who Hopkinson & Wiltse were, where they were headquartered, and what business they were involved in?



## MEETINGS

The next three meetings of the FCAHS are scheduled for April 22, May 27, and June 24, 1998. In April, attendees will provide their own program with the fourth annual "Remembrances of Times Past," postponed from the February meeting. In May, we will meet at Cooperstown Bat Company, just east of the Fly Creek four-corners on Route 28, where we will get a tour of the establishment. And, in June, craftsman Vic Sinnott will show the hand-cast and hand-painted "Mini Men" he creates. Meetings are held in the Fellowship Hall (basement) of the Fly Creek United Methodist Church beginning at 7 P.M., and are open to the public.

The most recent FCAHS meetings were held on January 28 and March 25, 1998, with the February gathering canceled due to inclement weather. Dot Martin spoke on "Early Fly Creek during the January meeting. She read two letters pertinent to area history. One was received from Carolyn McLean and written by Larry Gardner, reminiscing about the Fly Creek area between 1940-44. The other was from Mac Dulin to Ron Bouton, recounting the section (now the site of "Up the Creek Antiques") formerly known as the "Dulin Block." Also during this meeting, Jim Atwell displayed the butter churn recently purchased by the Society. The churn, patented in 1870, was made in Fly Creek by G. H. Gross & Co., and discovered in an antique shop in Schoharie.

In March, John Phillips presented "Sailing on Square Riggers." He described his adventure at sea in 1974, when he sailed on the *Brig Unicorn* (later used in the TV mini-series *Roots*) from New York to Florida. A three-day gale storm threw them off course and destroyed their communications system, and the subsequent becalming left them virtually motionless for nine days. The unpredictable weather turned the ten-day journey into a 33-day ordeal, during which the crew was presumed dead after an all-ocean watch failed to turn up the lost ship.

## FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY 1998 Roll of Membership -- Addendum

Listed below are additions to the FCAHS roster published in the last *Fly Creeker*. Included are new members Carol Aufmuth, Tom Bouton, William & Brenda Michaels, and Mary Westermann, bringing our paid 1998 membership up to 133. We welcome the newcomers, and offer a special welcome to Ms. Westermann, a Texas resident who never even heard of Fly Creek until she met Florence Michaels earlier this year!

AUFMUTH, H. James & Carol  
 \*BADGLEY, Mr. & Mrs. George  
 \*BAKER, David & Scottie  
 \*BERTINO, Dr. Joseph  
 BOUTON, Tom  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 BOYD, Spike & Joyce  
 BULLARD, Albert & Sandra  
 BURNS, John & Agnes  
 CHENEY, Mr. & Mrs. Harold, Jr.  
 \*FINCH, John & Jean  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 FISH, Jim & MerriLynn  
 HANOR, Katherine  
 JENKINS, Arthur & Ruby  
 \*LAUT, Dorothy Potts  
 LUDLAM, Henry & Toni  
 \_\_\_\_\_

LYONS, Irving  
 MARTIN, Homer & Leila  
 \*MARTIN, Peter & Dorothy  
 MICHAELS, William & Brenda  
 NAFZIGER, Dr. Anne  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 OSTAPECK, Lady  
 REILLY, Edward  
 SMALE, Capt. Gordon F.  
 STACK, Edward & Christina  
 THORNE, Edwin & Judy  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 WESTERMANN, Mary  
 \*WINNIE, Ernest & Gerda  
 WOLFF, James & Margaret  
 \_\_\_\_\_

\*Charter Member.

## MILLS OF FLY CREEK

People living in the area of Fly Creek fled during the Revolutionary War. After the War the Native Americans became more friendly. During the mid- to late-1790s settlers began returning to stay. Fly Creek was the western edge of the western frontier.

Residents needed the lumber from the land as it was cleared for pasture and gardening. They needed places to get their grain made into flour, instead of walking for two or three days to get to the nearest grist mill.

Fly Creek begins in a swampy area near the Town boundaries of Otsego and Springfield. It wends its way southward for seven or eight miles to join with Oaks Creek. The creek was very fast-flowing, allowing for the establishment of many mills for various purposes. During its heyday, there were at least eight mills on the shores of Fly Creek.

Of all those mills, there is only one that still uses water power for some of its operations. It is now known as the Fly Creek Cider Mill & Gift Shop. It was founded in 1856 by Hosea Williams, who was offered the mill's property for 22 years. In those days Williams received one cent per gallon to press apples into cider. He would produce about 3½ gallons per bushel of apples, and could make 150-200 barrels of cider per day. The pomace was used for animal feed. During the winter, Hosea sharpened tools and made bungs for casks and barrels.

In 1902 Daniel Curtis took over operation of the mill. Melvin Kane, Sr. bought it from Curtis in 1920. After Kane's death his son Lynn took over the mill, which was not used continuously.

Mr. and Mrs. Charles Michaels, the current owners, took over the mill in 1963. They have made several structural changes, and have had some of the original equipment refurbished and repaired. They operate it primarily as a seasonal (August-November) cider mill and gift shop.

The land on which the Fly Creek Cider Mill stands was purchased by John Badger from Levi Clark in 1807. The shop was then known as the Badger Pail Shop. The Badger Patent Pails were in great demand in New York and other eastern states. After Badger's death, E. & H. Cory ran the business, making pail keels and sap buckets. Several men were kept busy cutting, drying, and assembling them. These mills have "long since disappeared," according to Hurd's 1868 *History of Cooperstown*.

Before Hosea Williams's cider mill, the Mattison Pail Factory had operated in the same vicinity. There is not much known about Mr. Mattison's work, but it is known that he made sap buckets for area people. Some maps show Mattison's factory on the east side of the creek, others on the west side. As far back as 1917, I lived in the first house east of the bridge. I recall finding rows of stones that may have been the foundation of a building.

Asel Jarvis and his brother William, a physician, came to this area before 1790. Asel established several mill locations. A deed transferred land to him from Stephen North in 1813. According to Hurd's *History of Otsego County*, Jarvis erected the first foundry in the village of Fly Creek that year. It was located at the foot of the first hill going east from the creek. Jarvis had machine shops on the north side of the road, keeping many men employed. Chester and Kent Jarvis specialized in making carding machines and cotton gears for the mills in Oaksville.

At the same time John Badger was making sap buckets, two of his sons (one being Orestes) were engaged as gunsmiths. They made the first rifles in the county. In 1828, Orestes Badger bought the 21.3-acre parcel including the C. & K. Jarvis shops, and expanded the plant. Badger continued the business and made circular and cross-cut saws, power-driven equipment, and large hydrostatic presses for extracting oil from flax seed. He also manufactured power looms for cotton factories and large gear

wheels for cotton mills. Financial problems forced him to sell the business to Charles H. Metcalf and H. Bliss. In later years it was owned by Murdock (first name unknown) and, finally, by William Shepard. In the 1920s, children of the community spent many winter hours skating on the pond where this mill was located. Today, the pond area is overgrown with trees. It can still be seen from the road as a bank six or seven feet high above the surrounding area.

After selling to Metcalf & Bliss, Orestes Badger started the Badger Machine Shop in Fly Creek. There, he carried on a large business making "Badger Endless Chain Horse Powers," of which he was the inventor and patentee. Upon his death, his son Ezra W. Badger took over the business, making the horse powers, and threshers that could separate grain faster than any other overshot thresher. Ezra took first premium at the State Fair for his "Portable Saw Mills for Farm Use," and second on his "Chain Horse Powers." The products became widely-known and sought-after. Badger's business closed circa 1920.

About three-fourths of a mile from Fly Creek on Stone House Road is the site of the Williams Grist Mill. Across the creek was the Saw Mill. In 1801 Blair (first name unknown) had sold this "land with mills" to Asel Jarvis. Another conveyance shows Asel Jarvis receiving land from Thomas Edson, James Parsons, Peter Goodsell, and Silas Williams. It stayed in the Williams family for many years, and there was a John Williams living in the stone house in the 1920s. I recall going with my dad to buy a five-pound jar of butter that Mr. Williams had made.

Two-and-a-quarter miles north of Fly Creek, near Tanner Hill Road, was a saw mill on a small tributary of Fly Creek. B. Fitch owned it in 1868. A. W. Smith bought the land, but no mention of a mill was made in the transaction. Rufus Wykoff owned the land in 1881. Other names associated with the mill site were William Hall, Clarence Graves, and John B. Hooker. When Zadock Finch lived on the land (c. 1881-82) it was called the Copperhead Smith Farm. Current owner Francis Clark calls it Ravena Hill, and has built a dam for a pond at the approximate site of the original mill.

Driving north on the Fly Creek Valley road for about two miles, take the first road on the right. At the foot of a steep hill on the right, before crossing the bridge, you will see the site of the Davidson Saw Mill (the building and dam are no longer visible). One source says that "Urban Cobb sold the land to Davidson," while another states that William Cooper leased the land to Davidson in 1806. Douglas Trainor and Donald Bancroft received the mill and dam.

About 4.25 miles from Fly Creek was the site of the Shaw Saw Mill. This mill was on the south side of Panther Mountain Road on a tributary of Fly Creek. Andrew Shaw bought lot eight of the 12,000 Tract of land. He sold to William Shaw who in turn sold the "mill and lot with right of way" to Orson Shaw in 1880. J. Udovitch got the mill from the Shaw family. This mill has also long-since disappeared.

Richard Thurston bought land from Martin Pickens about 5.75 miles north of Fly Creek. Others became involved in what became known as the Thurston-Underwood Mill, including D. C. Underwood, Damon DeLong, Warren Ely, and possibly Nehemiah Hinds. Herbert Wedderspoon also was listed in a transaction, although there was no mention of a mill.

In this century a Mr. Vaughn visited the Thurston-Underwood Mill site, which he had located from a 1903 map. A dirt road to the right of the County Road follows along a waterway to a quarry. There was an upper dam of limestone blocks leading to a pond. Two channels led to the pond, which had a six-foot drop to a limestone-lined wheel pit with a wooden floor. Vaughn wrote that much "work should be done to explain fully what remains of the site," noting that facts "might add to the historical identity of Fly Creek."

Sources: Shaw's *History of Cooperstown*, Vaughn's *Waterpowered Industry of Fly Creek*, Hurd's *History of Otsego County*, Frost's *Life on Upper Susquehanna*, Child's *Otsego County Directory*, and Mosby's film *The Cider Mill at Fly Creek*. (Submitted by Florence W. Michaels)

### HOOKERS IN FLY CREEK

John Hooker, Jr. was born in 1868, the son of John B. and AnnEliza Olendorf Hooker. In 1885, when John, Jr. was 16, he published at least two issues of his own newspaper, *The Fly Creek Gazette* (see "Fly Creek Makes News," in the Summer 1997 *Fly Creeker*). Thirteen years later -- after graduating from Hartwick Seminary (1888) and Hamilton College (1892) -- Hooker was telegraph editor of the *Utica Press* during the Spanish-American War. He was also associated with the Winthrop Press in New York City, and his obituary headlines him as a "Former Editor."

Hooker returned to Fly Creek in 1903 -- the year his father died -- probably to help his mother manage the Hooker homestead and some of their other properties. Among those mentioned in John, Sr.'s will is a lot containing five acres on "the west side of the highway leading from Fly Creek village to Taylortown, and north of the ME parsonage lot, and known as the old hop lot." Also mentioned is "the lot on the east side of Hooker Ave." (now Schoolhouse Road) with 65 feet of road frontage, "on which is (Egbert Dickenson's) blacksmith shop now occupied." A 1905 map of Fly Creek shows most of the land on the east and south sides of Hooker Avenue (as well as a lot with house and barn on the west side) belonging to J. B. Hooker.

John, Sr. was impressed by the monument "placed in the Presbyterian grave yard in Fly Creek by Anne Bliss," and he requested one "after the pattern (to cost) not less than \$600 nor more than \$1,000." Such a monument now marks the Hooker plot just above the vault in the Fly Creek Valley Cemetery.

John Hooker, Jr. remained in Fly Creek for the remainder of his life. The 1905 census lists him as "farmer, Emp.," living with his mother. Florence Michaels remembers Hooker as a rather short, stout man, very interested in books and active in community affairs. At that time, the Hooker family lived in what is now Litco Farms Bed & Breakfast. John died suddenly from a heart attack while mowing his lawn in July, 1950. He and his wife, the former Mary Elizabeth Hutchins, are buried in a plot near his parents'. [Submitted by Carolyn McLean]

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#### 1998 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY P.O. Box 87, Fly Creek, NY 13337

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal \_\_\_ New Membership \_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Check applicable box(es):

- Please register me as a member of the FCAHS. Enclosed is a check for \$10.
- Please register us to a family FCAHS membership. Enclosed is a check for \$15.
- Please accept the enclosed donation, in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (minimum \$20), and enroll me/us as a contributing/sustaining member(s).

## WHERE DOES FLY CREEK BEGIN?

W. T. Bailey, in his 1874 book *Richfield Springs and Vicinity* (pages 135-37), states that Fly Creek (the body of water for which the village is named) "issues from the earth near a rocky ledge" in the Town of Otsego, near the southern border of the Town of Springfield. Other historians have stated that Fly Creek starts in a swamp. It might be interesting for some of us current historians to hike the region ourselves and report our findings. However, that area is such a tangle of hills, swamps, and small streams that it may be impossible -- or at best arbitrary -- to pin-point the source.

Bailey also states that in an area "high up (between Lake Otsego and) the valley of Fly Creek ... is what is known or supposed to have been a small lake at an early period." This overgrown area was known as 'The Fly,' and "from it the valley and the village one and a half miles to the westward derive their names."

Bailey describes "an ancient-looking little cottage" that was erected in 1790 by the father of the Hon. Kent Jarvis (note: *History of Otsego County, 1790-1878*, page 247, names Asel Jarvis as Kent's father). It was "near the old burying-ground at Fly Creek village." Bailey states that Kent Jarvis celebrated his 72nd birthday in 1873 (the year before this book was published) in that same house, hosting about 100 guests -- mostly from Fly Creek Valley -- to a "sumptuous banquet."

Bailey quotes the *Republican* in commenting on the longevity of the area's residents at that time: "from Fly Creek, taking a circle with a radius of a mile, we have 14 (citizens aged) 80 to 94, and 26 from 70 to 80... all of whom, with their present health, bid fair to see their one-hundredth birthday."

[Submitted by Carolyn McLean]

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**P.O. Box 87**  
**Fly Creek, NY 13337**

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