

# *Fly Creeker*

NEWSLETTER of the FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY (FCAHS)  
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## NEWS BRIEFS

- **Taking a Stand?** ... During the March FCAHS meeting, there was some discussion about the Town of Otsego's proposed new building, and whether the Society should take an official position on this issue. This was put on the agenda for formal discussion during the April 23 meeting. Those having something to say on the matter should plan to attend.
- **May I Have this Dance?** ... The monthly schedule of square and round dances will resume in May. Dances will be held at the FCAHS Building/Grange Hall on Cemetery Road on the first Saturday of each month through November, from 7-10 PM. Admission is free, and refreshments are available for purchase, with proceeds going to the FCAHS. The first three dances of 2003 are slated for May 3, June 7, and July 5.
- **FCAHS on WWW** ... Jim Wolff has registered the FCAHS on the WorldWide Web as "FCAHS.org." Jim also bought five e-mail names for us to use through this domain, and we could eventually have a web page set up at this address. E-mail for the newsletter editor can now be sent to Editor@FCAHS.org, while Trustees Jim Wolff (JimWolff@FCAHS.org) and Jim Atwell (JimAtwell@FCAHS.org) can also be e-mailed through the Society's registry.
- **Plea for Publications People** ... The shrinking Publications Committee will hold its annual meeting soon. It is tentatively scheduled for 6:30 PM, prior to the May 28, 2003 FCAHS meeting. Anyone interested in helping out with the newsletter – even just the stamping, labeling, and mailing every three months – is asked to contact the editor.
- **Refreshing** ... Reminder: those in charge of refreshments for the upcoming meetings are Freida Snyder & Elaine Harvey (April), Inga Roemer & MerriLynn Fish (May), Barbara Lyon & Ann Geiger (June).
- **Renewing** ... Welcome to our newest members, **John Frank**, Don Houser & Teri Hayward, and Richard, Diane, Robbie & Eric Richardson. The following have renewed their FCAHS memberships since the last newsletter was published: Mike Ainslie, Art & Marge Andrews, \*Jim Atwell & Anne Geddes-Atwell, H. James Aufmuth, Jayne M. Aufmuth, \*Rev. Kenneth R. Baldwin, Ronald & Carol Bouton, William & Rita Boyd, **Hartwick & Catherine Christiansen**, \*Margaret Clark, **Robert E. Clayton**, Richard & Dora Cooke, Helen Davis, **Dorothy Famulare**, Mary Farmer, Bill & Bobbie Gates, Charles & Annie Goodspeed, Robert Grodd & Elizabeth Hamdy, Robert L. Jones, Jean T. Knapp, Harry & Ellen Levine, Nancy J. McRorie, Jean W. Neff, Bob & Kay Pierro, \*Maxine Potts, \*William & Paula Schaeffer, **Edward & Christina Stack**, Ed & Judy Thorne, Judy Vidal, and \*Ernest & Gerda Winnie. Those marked with asterisks are charter members, and those in bold are contributing members. This brings our 2003 membership total to 142, a disturbing decrease from last year's 174 and the previous year's 203.
- **New & Improved** ... The revised edition of the Fly Creek brochure has been completed. Designed and produced by Anne Geddes-Atwell, the brochure now includes a page about our Historical Society. It is available at the Town Building and local establishments.

## NEWS BRIEFS, Continued

- **Secret Admirer ...** From Merrilyn O'Connell, President of the Town of Middlefield Historical Association, comes one of the best compliments the *Fly Creeker* has received to date. Merrilyn reports that, when she receives our newsletter in the mail, the seal is always broken – suggesting that someone is sneaking a free read before putting it in the post office box!
- **Bad Language ...** The English language has changed since the early days of the Fly Creek area. Witness *The American Democrat*, an 1838 book by the Town of Otsego's most famous citizen, James Fenimore Cooper: "Many words are in a state of mutation, the pronunciation being unsettled even in the best society, a result that must often arise where language is as variable and undetermined as the English. To this class belong 'clerk,' 'cucumber' and 'gold,' which are often pronounced as spelt, though it were better and more in conformity with polite usage to say 'clark,' 'cowcumber,' (not *cowcumber*) and 'goold.' For *lootenant* (lieutenant) there is not sufficient authority, the true pronunciation being '*levtenant*.'"



## MEETINGS

The next three meetings of the FCAHS are scheduled for April 23, May 28, and June 25, 2003. Society gatherings are held FCAHS meetings are normally held on the fourth Wednesday of each month at the FCAHS Building/Grange Hall on Cemetery Road beginning at 7 PM, and everyone is welcome.

The program for the April meeting is "Stewards of a Building's History," presented by Dr. Gilbert Vincent, President of the New York State Historical Association (please also note the agenda item reported on page 1). The May topic will be "The Poetry of This Place," with Susan Melchior and a small troupe trying to capture the spirit of this area in poems. And the June program will be "Where'd Baseball Come From?" by Tim Wiles of the National Baseball Hall of Fame. Tim will probe back in history, probably as far as the Middle Ages, to find the family line of baseball.

The three most recent get-togethers were held on January 22, February 26, and March 19, 2003. In January, a small group braved frigid weather to hear Bill Deane speak about his new Fly Creek-based business, "Chronic Care Financial Planning." Using expertise gathered during his years as a Senior Medicaid Examiner stationed at The Meadows, Bill provides asset protection and Medicaid planning for families with potential chronic care needs. He noted that, in this area, the average cost of a nursing home – which is not covered by Medicare or other health insurance – is over \$70,000 per year.

In February, Sherlee Rathbone gathered some local seniors – Art Andrews, Ron Bouton, John Schallert, and Bill Talbot – who presented "Once Upon a Time in Fly Creek." The four, particularly Ron, recalled people, places, and memories from the Fly Creek and Oaksville areas. Among the topics were long-departed "characters" such as Honey Joe, former schools and business, swimming holes, suicides, and a ghost story. After more than an hour of interesting conversation, the meeting adjourned of its own volition. During the earlier business meeting, it was announced that Senator Jim Seward had been awarded a lifetime FCAHS membership, in appreciation for his help in our securing last year's \$20,000 grant.

In a replacement program for March, Jim Atwell presented "Robert's Rules Made Easy." Jim discussed parliamentary procedure as it applies to meetings such as ours, taking the basic principles propounded in the 700-page *Robert's Rules of Order*, and condensing them into an informative and user-friendly presentation. Hopefully, we will see its effects in future FCAHS meetings.

## THE SPRAGUES OF FLY CREEK VALLEY

The photo below, from the 1860s, shows Hezekiah Sprague and his family: wife Mary (Knowlton), daughter Emma, and sons Jenks and Charles. Emma, who married Lewis Hinds, was my step-great-grandmother. The Spragues were early settlers of Fly Creek Valley. Hezekiah's father, Jonah Sprague, had fought in the War of 1812.

The Spragues lived where Clyde Yakos resided until recently, right at the bottom of Tanner Hill on what is now County Route 26. They built the house there after first living in a log cabin. The nearby District No. 12 School was called the Sprague School and the cemetery was also named after them.

Hezekiah was a Colonel in the Militia and served as the Town of Otsego's Justice of the Peace. He was very active in the church and community, always helping neighbors with legal affairs and other problems. He died in 1882 and is buried in the Sprague Cemetery, along with his wife and father.

[Submitted by Sally Rezen]



## NATTY BUMPPPO SLEPT HERE ...

Something intriguing in the 1878 *History of Otsego County*. The book says that the prototype for James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo was an old man who wandered in and out of Cooperstown during Cooper's youth. His name was David Shipman, and he lived three miles out of the village on the east bank of Oaks Creek, about halfway between Toddsville and Fly Creek hamlet. That puts his cabin about where Oaks and Fly creeks converge, just above Fork Shop Road.

And it means that the original Leatherstocking lived his later years not a mile from my house, which was already standing in those days. Of course I like to imagine the rough-cut old recluse standing in my dooryard, drinking from a tin dipper, or perhaps inside on a bleak November day, warming by the fireside.

It'd be stretching it to say, "Natty Bumppo slept here" – but, who knows? Maybe a March nor'easter, sweeping in a wall of snow on blizzard winds, blocked him from getting home one evening. Maybe old Bumppo spent a night snoring by my hearth, scenting the air with the deerskin he wore and (given his likely hygiene) with his own hide.

But the *History* adds another detail, one Cooper chose to ignore. For a while Bumppo, i.e., Shipman, had a wife sharing the cabin where the creeks join. She died well before David, and he brought a Baptist minister from Hartwick to bury her close by their home. The minister was outraged by the site David had chosen. It was boggy land (still is), and as the grave was dug, it half filled with water. Shipman was adamant; she must be buried by their home.

"And if I live to die," the book quotes him, "I expect to be buried there myself."

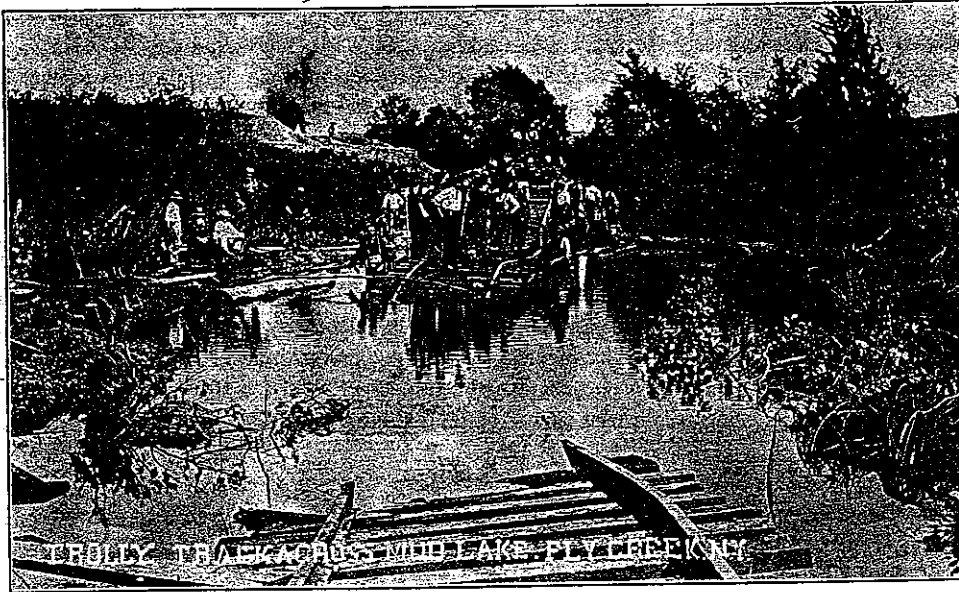
It's Shipman's "if" that stops you. 'Most all of us, after all, manage to live long enough to die. But for David Shipman, it seems to have been possibility rather than certainty. That's disarming. Even endearing.

Well, David did live to die, though it happened many years later. But, sad to say, they didn't lay him to rest beside his wife. The 1878 *History* says he was buried in the Adams Cemetery, which now fronts on County Route 26. By 1878, the exact site in the cemetery had already been forgotten.

I think of the original Bumppo when I walk past that cemetery. And when I hike through the wet stretches where Oaks and Fly Creek converge, I think of his missus, given a burial at sea, though a good ways inland. Left there in another lost grave to carry on the long voyage alone.

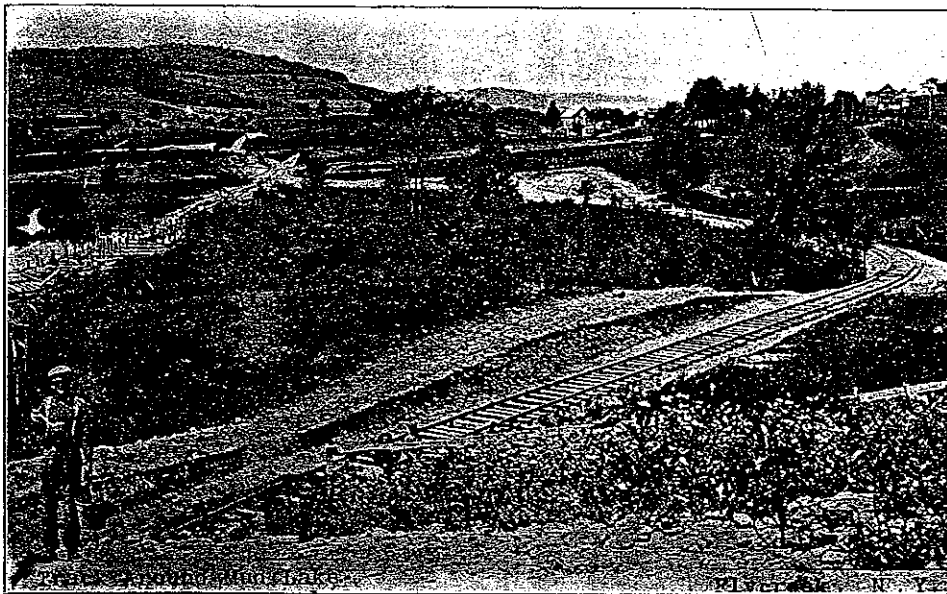
Leatherstocking wouldn't have wanted that. I'm sure of it. [Submitted by Jim Atwell, from his 1995 "From Fly Creek" *Freeman's Journal* column.]





### ITS NAME IS MUD

The post cards above and below are from the collection of Carolyn McLean. Each was published by F. J. Wiltse, Oneonta, NY, and required a one-cent stamp for mailing. The photos depict attempts, during the first decade of the twentieth century, to route the trolley passenger system tracks over and then around Fly Creek's Mud Lake. See the Winter, 1991 and Winter, 2000 editions of *The Fly Creeker* for further information.



## SHOWING ITS AGE

The mystery of our building's age has been reported here before. The 1991 *Otsego County Bi-Centennial Engagement Calendar* said the Fly Creek Grange #844 was organized about February 1, 1895. However, all other evidence we have seen, including the poster in our building, indicates it was founded in 1898. They originally met in what became the Fly Creek Hotel, until the current building was completed. The question is, when did that happen?

Town Historian and FCAHS member Marion Brophy has made some significant finds on this subject. According to Marion, the February 29, 1928 edition of the Cooperstown *Freeman's Journal* reported that "The regular meeting of the Fly Creek Grange, No. 844, Saturday evening, February 18<sup>th</sup>, will long be remembered by those present. Thirty years ago the hall was built by a stock company. The Grange has been buying the stock as they could. On February 15<sup>th</sup> they paid the mortgage in full. The hall now is the property of Fly Creek Grange. During the meeting Saturday evening the mortgage was burned by the Master, F.L. Kane. While the mortgage was burning, short sketches of the history, and struggles of the Grange were given by those present. To further celebrate the occasion all enjoyed a fine oyster supper."

The March 14, 1928 issue followed up with "The Fly Creek Building Association, which was formed for the purpose of building the Grange Hall, has been dissolved, as its mission has been performed and the mortgage on the hall redeemed." Also, according to the Deed in Liber 242 of Deeds, page 155, dated February 25, 1899, the Fly Creek Building Association purchased the land for \$99.95. Then in Liber 341 of Deeds, page 591 is a deed dated February 14, 1928 from the Fly Creek Building Association to the Fly Creek Grange No. 844 for the land and building.

So, though the building's purchase was underway by 1898, it appears that its actual construction couldn't have occurred before 1899, when the land was bought.

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