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A Kaleidoscope of Greenville Village History by **RAYMOND BEECHER**

Situated in post-glacial uplands between the Hudson River Valley and the northern Catskills, Greenville Township, and the village at its hub, has for decades attracted families to the summer boarding houses, as well as for permanent residency. The Albany-Greene County line at the northern edge of the extended village has the expected political ramifications, but otherwise means little to those who frequently cross the line to shop at Country Square Mall, use the public library, attend denominational churches, and send their offspring to a central school district that reaches into Albany County as far as Rensselaerville.

This article provides an overview of Greenville Village historical highlights. More detailed accounts of Major Augustine Prevost's life, the first Academy, and the Coxsackie-Greenville Turnpike, may be found in *Out to Greenville and Beyond* by Raymond Beecher [Hope Farm Press, Cornwallville, NY] and in Beers' 1884 *History of Greene County* [republished by Hope Farm Press].

They came to these unsettled lands in the Greenville section of the Coeymans Patent before the American Revolution: Godfrey Brandow, from the Saugerties-Embought area, in 1750; Stephen Lantman [*Lampman*, who would marry the oldest Brandow daughter], from Coeymans settlement, in the winter of 1759-60; and finally Jacob Bogardus, from Coxsackie, in 1772. Locating on lands leased from Coeymans heirs and the TenEycks in the more southwesterly section of what was to become the Township of Greenville, these men and their families became closely associated - some by ties of marriage, others by sharing the vicissitudes of pioneer life.

With the outbreak of the rebellion against autocratic English rule, and fearful of British and Indian raiding parties from beyond the Catskills, Bogardus abandoned his clearing for the duration of the war. Apparently the Brandows and the Lampmans were equally wary. But none, however, permanently gave up their land claims.

With the defeat of the British and their Indian allies, Jacob Bogardus returned to his Greenville lands in the spring of 1783, bringing his wife, Catherine Overbaugh, and their four offspring. He next induced his brother, Nanning Bogardus of Coxsackie, to settle on 200 acres of the original Bogardus holdings. Nanning arrived in 1784. Godfrey Brandow, the first settler, also returned; he remained on his farmstead until his death in

1795. He is buried in a now-lost gravesite on that land. Lampman is known to have eventually converted his dwelling between Greenville and Coxsackie into a wayfarer's tavern; the building was also used for community religious and educational needs. The claim has been made that Lampman had the first sawed frame house in the Township.

Large families, coupled with a shortage of fertile land for cultivation, caused New Englanders to consider migration as the Revolutionary War wound down. In 1781, even before the signing of the treaty of Peace in Paris, a group of families from Woodbury, Connecticut agreed to finance a small scouting expedition to locate desirable unoccupied land in New York for settlement. Among the men selected for the scouting party were Benjamin Spees, Edward Lake and Eleazer Knowles. They afterwards recommended a move to what would eventually become the Greenville-Norton Hill area. State Historic markers identify Eleazer Knowles' 600-acre claim on the east brow of Budd's Hill. Benjamin Spees' 600-acre stake included an abandoned Tory squatter's crude shelter at the northerly edge of the Village. Finally, Edward Lake established his farmstead on land that would be known in the mid-1800s as the Ezra Sherrill place.

Each year, more and more settlers came into this section of what was then part of lower Albany County. They came from New England, and they came from the counties closer to metropolitan New

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York. But the settlers from Woodbury and other places wrongly assumed that the Prevost patents were "null and void," since both General Prevost and his son, Major Augustine, had actively fought for the British in the late war. It was a stunning blow to these pioneers to discover that their "sweat of the brow" land clearing efforts and their labors to raise shelter, were subject to forfeiture since the Prevost claims were, in fact, still considered valid! Seeking legal occupancy rights and title, 38 of the settlers petitioned the New York State Legislature for remedial action. But their appeal, dated March 18, 1792, had little effect because it was opposed by politically well-connected attorney Aaron Burr.

For Major Augustine Prevost, the legal battle with these settlers was crucial: of the millions upon millions of acres of pre-Revolutionary land grants to the Prevosts and George Croghan [the father of Prevost's first wife], these patents in then-Albany County were all that remained. The failure of the newly-formed New York State government to sequester these Prevost land holdings - as it had so many of the Loyalist estates in the more-settled areas - is a puzzlement. It is known that Abraham Lott, son-in-law to Andries Coeymans, had put in a claim for what he termed "unappropriated lands," and had attempted to name the Greenville area *Lottsania*.

The "unknown factor" that probably saved the Prevost title was no more than the legal skill of Aaron Burr, who was then married to one of Augustine's aunts. Burr was quick to use the terms of the Treaty of Peace to strengthen Major Augustine's claims [General Prevost had, by this time, turned over his interests here to son Augustine]. Fortunately for the settlers, however, the Major was decidedly short of funds, and seized the opportunity to sell to the "squatters" on easy terms.

Following the Major's second marriage, on July 2, 1792, to Anna Bogardus, a Catskill merchant's daughter, Prevost laid out his Home Farm bounds and contracted with Fitch Lamphere to build a wood-framed manor house on 260 acres, at a cost of \$1,312.25. The family affixed the name *Hush Hush* to the residence; the name and the house both endure to this day, still located on a secluded plot north of Route 81 between Greenville Village and Norton Hill. [The author was responsible for the successful application to National Historic Register status. -Ed.]

Prevost family members are buried in Locust Cemetery, a short distance west. And although no Prevosts now reside at their manor house, they still retain the unexercised privilege of grazing their sheep among the tombstones!

Greenfield [Greenville after 1808] Township was set off from "the Western Territory" [then Freehold] and Coxsackie, on March 26, 1803. A set of Town officials was then required. The Knowles residence was designated the gathering place for the first town meeting. Here, on Tuesday, April 5, 1803, sixteen men were elected to serve: as commissioners of highways, pound masters, constables, overseers of the poor, assessors, tax collector, town clerk, and supervisor. Stoddard Smith was elected the township supervisor. A pressing order of business was to designate the bounds of the various road districts. And education received attention when the 14 original school districts were established in 1813.

Firm in their faith, this first generation of Greenville settlers commenced building a hipped-roof edifice for religious services in 1793, the same year the congregation offered the Reverend Beriah Hotchkin its pastorage. This pioneer church body had previously worshipped in Benjamin Spees' barn. The Reverend Hotchkin and his family were then in residence at New Durham, having migrated earlier from New England. To enhance the proposed salary of £75, 50 acres of land, identified in Beers' *History of Greene County* as "embracing Botsford's Hill and the meadows lying between it and the brook" were included. Today we know this section of the Village as West Street along Route 81 - although to some it will always be Botsford's Hill. Reverend Hotchkin, then 41 years of age, accepted the call from the Presbyterian Church body. For the next 30 years he would be a powerful religious leader, not only to Greenville Village but to other surrounding congregations. Tradition has it that the Hotchkin family resided in a one-room structure on the 50-acre grant.

On August 27, 1800, under the direction of Elon Norton, a master builder, the Presbyterian Church's second timber-raising took place. This more elaborate structure, with spire and balcony, was completed and dedicated on September 18, 1801. Other changes continued as unforeseen events occurred, and the present Presbyterian Church building is the third erected on the general site by this congregation. The church land was a

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Greenville Village: Looking northeast across the junction of Routes 32 and 81. The building with rear staircase at photo center is the Vanderbilt "Opera House." The spire at top left is the Greenville Presbyterian Church. The upper floor of the Academy is visible below and in front of the church, but behind the Charles Roe house. The large building at far left is the funeral parlor.

gift from Major Prevost.

Methodism in Greenville was first established at King Hill on the easterly edge of the Township; next came the Methodist Chapel at West Greenville. In 1856 that West Greenville framework was taken down and re-erected in the Village, on the east side of South Street. That structure burned in 1873, and was replaced by a new House of Worship on the opposite side of the street. Although this last building still survives, it has been converted to private use. Its Methodist congregation has merged with the Norton Hill parish.

In 1825 an Anglican parish had been organized at East Greenville; in 1852, plans were finalized to build a stone Gothic-style church at a more central location, on North Street in Greenville Village. The foundation stone for the present building came from the George Calhoun farm, opposite the site of St. John's R. C. Church. The red sidewall stone was quarried from the Truman Sanford acres, now Turon's, east of the Village atop Stevens Hill.

The growth of the resort industry and the increase in the Roman Catholic population in the 20th century, brought into being the St. John the Baptist parish in Greenville Village. At first, this church was under the supervision of St. Patrick's R. C. Church in Catskill, but St. John's eventually

secured its own resident priest and purchased its own rectory. The present church structure is the second on the general site.

Throughout the 19th century, there were several efforts to connect Greenville Village with the main routes of travel. The Cocksackie Turnpike was built in 1805-1806, to connect with the busy Susquehanna Turnpike between milestones 21 and 22 of the latter roadway. In 1852 the Cocksackie-Oak Hill Plank Road sought to build an all-weather thoroughfare *via* today's hamlet of Earlton. The Greenville and Potter Hollow Turnpike was actually an extension of the 1805-1806 Cocksackie Turnpike. Connections were also made with the Schoharie Turnpike, which ran from Athens to the Schoharie community. In the more easterly section of Greenville Township came the Greenfield Turnpike of 1806; this was to connect with the Albany and Delaware road. But as the 19th century progressed, many sections of these turnpikes were found to be unprofitable, and were abandoned by their corporate owners to the various townships.

Minimum education for basic skills had been an early priority for the Greenville settlers. Opportunities for higher education had come with the founding of the Greenville Academy as a semi-public stock corporation in 1815. The following year it was chartered by the Regents of

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the University of the State of New York. Tuition charges continued through the remainder of the 19th century.

In the mid-1890s, the school experienced a rapid turnover in principals. Newspaper reports from late July 1895, for example, state that Professor Z. W. Stewart was having unspecified difficulties, and had resigned to relocate in the west. Professor Ayers, an Academy principal who later garnered a favorable reputation as head of the Catskill school system, could not be persuaded to remain at the Greenville Academy. The Ayers continued to visit Greenville, however, since Mrs. Ayers' father was Alexander N. Bentley, a Greenville merchant. The Greenville Free Academy was to replace the Greenville Academy. The first diploma from this new school system was issued to Miss Edith L. Budd in the spring of 1902.

Since the voters had previously approved funding for a more modern schoolhouse, in April 1905 John Brown of Coxsackie was awarded the construction contract. The 90-year-old first building was torn down that July, and the workmen were soon busy preparing a new basement and foundation. Then, for unknown reasons, Brown found himself "over his head" and abruptly gave up the contract. But this difficulty was obviously resolved, since carpenters were putting up the building frame in October. The heaters were installed by December. The following July [1906] the belfry was completed, and the first Academy's bell was safely hoisted up to its new quarters. George Hunt had the contract to paint the new building.

The funding voted by the taxpayers had not included authorization for new furnishings and equipment: it had been assumed that much could be salvaged from the old building. This situation led to the formation of an informal "Friends of the Greenville Free Academy," whose function was to solicit funds for "portable property." Nearly \$500 had been pledged by December 1905. A generous gift came from Miss Helen M. Gould of New York and Roxbury, whose grandfather had been a local resident. Lansing S. Thorne, a former Greenville boy, sent \$100 from Texas.

The final graduation ceremonies before the new building came into use, brought out a capacity crowd. The newspaper had favorable remarks to make about the exercises, "several tiresome features of the former years eliminated." Two students, Edna Story and Raymond Boomhower,

comprised the graduating class. Rose Green won the prize of \$10.00 in spelling, Nellie Palmer the \$5.00 prize for the year's best improvement. Grace Easland took the \$5.00 prize for the highest average in Regents examinations. There were two winners of the Speaking Contest: Mary Roe received the first prize, \$3.00, and Dorothy McCabe the second prize, \$2.00.

The 1906-1907 school terms began the day after Labor Day, with the "promise of a large attendance made up from many outside pupils. New laboratory and library supplies have been added and everything both inside and outside the building is in good shape." In fact, the Greenville Free Academy was an instant success. By the fall of 1910, the classrooms were so crowded that talk was circulating on the need for an annex!

It should be noted that although the Academy was never a true boarding school with its own dormitories, it *did* attract many students from outside the district. Among the more noted 19th century enrollees were the sons of Kinderhook's Martin VanBuren. They boarded and roomed at the George Calhoun farmhouse on West Street, as did VanBuren himself when he came and went.

Annella Dinnal Ingalls states that Leonard Palmer as well as Ruth Rundell Grenici told about boarding during the school week, at least during the winter months, at the large white house going west out of the Village: "My mother, Ellen Hoagland Dinnel [daughter of Page T. Hoagland, who owned and printed the *Oak Hill Record* newspaper], born 1889 in Oak Hill... [was sent] to Greenville Academy for one school year. She boarded for the winter at the Wakely House. Mama told me that each morning, early, either a member of the family or possibly the hired man, came into her bedroom before she arose and started a fire in the fireplace."

That the Wakelys were among the families "taking in Academy boarders" is also evidenced by a newspaper advertisement from November 10, 1891: "Mrs. Frank Wakely would like two or three Academy boys to board. Terms \$2 for the School Week."

Out-of-town attendance at the Academy was as much a news item then, as attending college is today. One reads: "Oak Hill [9/10/1910]- Wright and Ida Gibson and Leslie Wade have resumed their studies at the Greenville High School."

Principal G. L. Cook was publicizing that fall of 1910 that the term would open on September 6:

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"The principal will be at his home on North Street from August 18th until September 6th, and will be glad to answer any questions that may be asked him concerning books, tuition, board, etc. All who desire textbooks should notify him as he will send in orders to the publishing houses a week before the opening of school." Twenty-five pupils from outside the district enrolled for that year, each paying a modest fee. The first baseball game that September pitted the High School team against a group from Freehold. The High School team won.

As usual, the game was played on the Vanderbilt Opera House playing field.

Plans for the most modern drug store in Greene County were being prepared as early as 1894, by architect George H. Warner, for George C. McCabe. As the year progressed B. F. Dayter began shaping three large circular counters for the new store, whose design and workmanship was to attract public interest.

In 1895, Carrie F. Sanford sold Legrand Ellis 58.5 acres of land and a blacksmith shop. Ellis immediately set to work modernizing the old building, and would serve for a time as the Village blacksmith. Madison Stevens, the local undertaker, sold his mortuary firm to Elmer Hunt. Hunt and his family were moving to Greenville to take up quarters in the Spees house. Reports were circulating that M. P. Stevens was departing for the west. [In any event, his remaining lifespan was a short one, and the family interred him in a "ten-ton sarcophagus" purchased from C. A. Noble of Coxsackie. The casket had been on display at Noble's monument works for some time.]

Hunt would soon sell out to Ambrose J.

Cunningham. In May 1901 Charles Roe, whose house once stood on the site of the Greenville branch of the National Bank of Coxsackie [see photo, page 13], was busy moving his barn to make room for a new funeral parlor, furniture store and residential quarters for A. J. Cunningham. By the end of February 1902, the Cunninghams had moved into this new home.

The 1890s were a time of great change in Greenville. The need to supply the Village with a more dependable water supply was being resolved in 1896 with the incorporation of the Greenville Water Company [capital stock \$10,000 in 400 shares]. This venture had Delaware County sponsorship: Charles L. Andrus, George W. Kendall and E. A. Andrus of Stamford; F. M. Andrus, Daniel D. Andrus, Richard B. Robinson and N. E. Andrus of Roxbury. Work on the gravity system commenced in September 1896, and by late October the work of laying the pipes was nearly completed.

Telephone connections within the area and to more distant points were also underway. In September 1901, telephone wires were being strung between Greenville and Norton Hill. The following April, poles for the Freehold-Greenville line were being installed by Harry Phinney, William Whitbeck and Fred Hallock. That May, the wires on the Greenville-Coxsackie line were being strung by Van Hoesen and Hoose.

The late 19th century also saw plans finalized to blanket Greene County communities, including Greenville Village, with electric trolley lines. The Coxsackie-Greenville Traction Company was busy issuing stock, surveying the proposed route, and planning to acquire rights-of-way. The promoters

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AT LEFT, the new meets the old for the first time in Greenville: Helen Miller Gould's "horseless carriage" passes through the Village on its way to Roxbury and Oneonta. The photo was shot on Main Street in front of "McCabe & Co.," the new village drug store.



ABOVE, the Greenville-Urlton [*Earlton*] motor stage to Coxsackie, circa 1920.

were soon to realize, however, that the arrival of the horseless carriage would doom their mass transit plans. Early in July, 1900, there was considerable excitement in the Village as an automobile passed through on Main Street on its way from Tarrytown [the Lyndhurst Gould estate] to Oneonta. The newspaper account identified it as "the first automobile ever seen in this vicinity."

The Vanderbilt Opera House was apparently known as *Botsford's Hall* for a time. The building was a transplant from East Greenville, where it had served as the first Episcopal structure in the Township. After completion of the present stone parish church in the Village, its Vestry voted in 1878 to sell the East Greenville property at auction. The winning bidder, at \$7,610, was Dr. Gideon Botsford. The church organ went to Dr. Charles P. McCabe.

George V. Vanderbilt once stated that his father, William S. Vanderbilt, had had the East Greenville structure taken down and re-erected on the northern edge of his Village property, land facing West Street. Obviously, Vanderbilt must have made some business arrangement with Dr. Botsford.

Like most of its contemporaries in small towns and villages, the term *Opera* in the title was more name than substance. Light opera, at best, as well as run-of-the-mill plays, were the general offerings. Greenville's Vanderbilt was one of the stops for traveling stock companies. The Graham

Stock Company, for example, would play most of a week. The school also arranged for Shakespearean performances at the hall. The classes would march down from the old school for matinee performances.

Additionally, Vanderbilt rented out the hall for numerous local fund-raising events and school activities. Numerous newspaper items reflect this:

"The Tennessee Jubilee Singers make melody at Vanderbilt Hall, Greenville, Saturday night..." [November 10, 1894]

"A donation for Rev. T. A. Snyder of Christ Church will be held at the Opera House, January 21st..." [January 18, 1896]

"The I.O.G.T. [a Temperance group] will have a public installation of officers at Vanderbilt Hall..." [February 10, 1896]

While the Free Academy structure was being built, the hall was utilized to house the primary grades. It was during this time that the building almost suffered an early demise: the drafts in the heating stoves were left open, which caused the siding to catch fire. The blaze was discovered in the nick of time to save the structure. Before the construction of the first Central School building, Vanderbilt Hall also housed the high school's basketball games. Spectators had a choice of sitting on the stage, or sitting along the narrow sidelines that were practically on top of the playing court. Players and side-wall spectators frequently collided.