

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

May 2026, Issue 345

Jon Palmer—Gr Co in Ameri Rev

A pleasant May day in the 60s midday and then 50s by meeting time awaited those anticipating a visit from Jonathan Palmer: Susan Cunningham, Lawrence Brown, Johanne & Robert Titus, Bette Welter, Maryann Morrison, Stewart Wagner, Peter O'Hara & John Garofalo, Gail Nichol森, Dennis Mower, Elaine & Toby Nevins, Roland Reissig, Doris Philipp, Linda Berger, John Snider, David Tschinkel, Tom Sweeney, Jonathan Palmer, Anita Orsino, Joyce Chase, Melanie Lekocevic, Stephanie Ingalls, Christine Mickelsen, Holger Wrede, Jack Van Auken, Debra & Don Teator, one unreadable, and a few others that have escaped recall.

Jon Palmer's name on the Library's front board drew the usual host to another worthy program. Although not done specifically for a big anniversary, Jonathan's topic was a fitting

one to coincide with the celebration of our country's 250th.

The early press release offered: "Join Greene County Historian Jon Palmer for a talk on the broad array of primary source materials and traditional accounts that tell the story of the American Revolution in Greene County. From ambushes and skirmishes to political intrigue and tests of loyalty, this talk will focus on noteworthy episodes and the remarkable surviving documents that preserve the evidence of these foundational events in our region's history."

And with a twinkle in his eye, the historian/humorist speaker started the program with a declaration saying little or nothing happened in Greene County during the American Revolution. We chuckled at Jon's insouciance but knew we were in for a historical journey.

Disclaimer: I find Jonathan's programs one of the more difficult programs to adequately convey for this newsletter. It is chocked full of information (meaty?), I have no photos, and Jonathan usually has no printed script. Almost everything he speaks comes from a well prepared head but each talk on the topic could be different, he maintains. So, with all apologies, I will do the best to capture a few essences of Jonathan's talk – Understanding Local Documentation of the War for Independence 1775-1783.

A starting point is the existence of Greene County during the American Revolution (AR).



Some of you are already nodding your heads. Nope, there was no such thing.

Greene County came into existence in 1800, with the roughly southern half in Ulster County at one time and then the upper half part of Albany County. One photo I took in the darkness of Jonathan's program is the map of NY at the turn of AR.

There are some strange looking names? Tryon County (north and west)? Charlotte (north & VT)? Others like Orange and Dutchess are familiar, as is Six Nations territory.

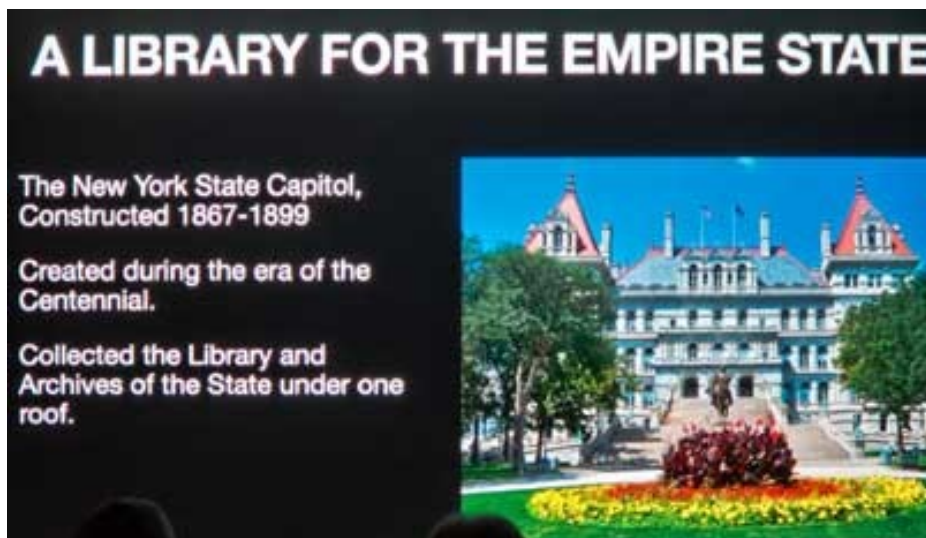
Still, of course, we can know what happened on land that would become Greene County. That answer came later.

Jonathan started his program with the photo of the NYS Capitol, center for the state library. The library was started in 1818 and then contained, along with the archive, into the Capitol which was constructed 1867 through 1899 as one can read from the photo.

Alas, the Capitol suffered a devastating fire in March 1911, destroying substantial portions not only of the Capitol but also the Library and the Museum. Hundreds of thousands of books, manuscripts and artifacts were burned, leaving perhaps ten percent of the total collection singed and semi-intact.

Jonathan pointed out that some of the lesser used documents, and thus placed at the bottom of the piles, and thus took longer for the fire to get to, and thus possibly were singed but saved, were documents written in Dutch from the very earliest workings of New York (New Amsterdam). These documents awaited translation.

As interesting as this might be, this pre-story led to one of Jonathan's major points:



How do we know today what happened back then, and from where did the sources come.

Unfortunately, some many valued pieces were lost for eternity. Copies found off site might help but a whole new inventory had to be created, with so many original papers never to be seen again.



Another vital element of Jonathan's presentation was the existence of the Cossackie Articles of Association, also called the Cossackie Declaration. It was a risky document to sign but 225 freeholders of the Cossackie area penned their names in 1775, a year before the national Declaration of Independence. Seeming to be insurrectionist from the British point of view, the document committed the signers to resisting British oppression.

Area people were alarmed by the Parliament's tax acts and of course were shocked by the battle of Lexington and Concord. The need to protect their rights came to the fore.

Signers pledged to support the Continental Congress, vowing to never become slaves while hoping for a peaceful constitutional reconciliation with Great Britain.

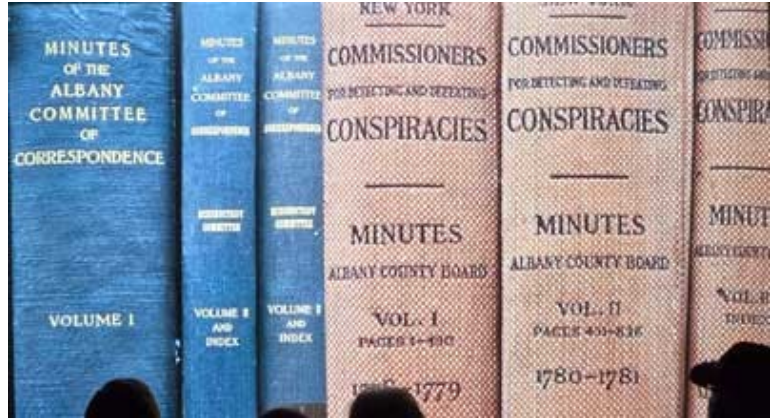
This signing was done at the home of Leonard Bronk, now part of the Bronck Museum.

One of Jonathan's slides is a roster of men, divided into columns of "patriots" and "Tories." Jonathan pointed out people of both sides, and some of no opinion, lived and had lived side by side for years.

This Articles of Association remains one of the only surviving of its type from the Hudson Valley from 1775.

These Articles do point to a tension that portended revolution but this leads to a larger question: – How do we know what happened back then? And this leads to two points.

Jonathan noted that we of modern America (yes, even those us sitting in classrooms over seventy years ago) were taught the trimmed outline of what happened: Concord, Lexington, Bunker Hill, Declaration of Independence, George Washington, SA-RATOGA!, Yorktown, the end, peace and



rights for everyone. Or, as Jonathan put it – the rear view of history fuzzes the reality of what really happened.

A chuckle emanated from the audience, knowing it was a bunch of more compli-



Roster of name: "Friend?" or "Enemy?"

cated and Jonathan drove the point home. He averred it is estimated that one-third of the population then was independence minded (or any of the other terms used to describe that rabble), another third as loyalist (Tory, loyal to the King), and one third wishing to take neither side. Palmer noted that although we call it a revolution for independence, in truth, it was a civil war.

Imagine riding into town, having a quaff at the local tavern, talking to your neighbor and having to be careful what you said, not knowing where it might end up. And the consequence of those everyday situations did have consequences, for both sides and especially those people who were born English subjects and who wished to remain so.

That 1775-1777 period had to have been one of the most intensely unsettling, unstable times in what would become US History. And a broad taste of it comes from Committees that formed - groups or associations of like-minded (independence) people (men, usually) who knew they had to be circumspect in their meeting places. Jonathan noted the irony of democracy-seeking people mandating that members of these committees swear secrecy to their meetings and their membership. We should remember that their lives could well depend on it, especially in the more contested areas.

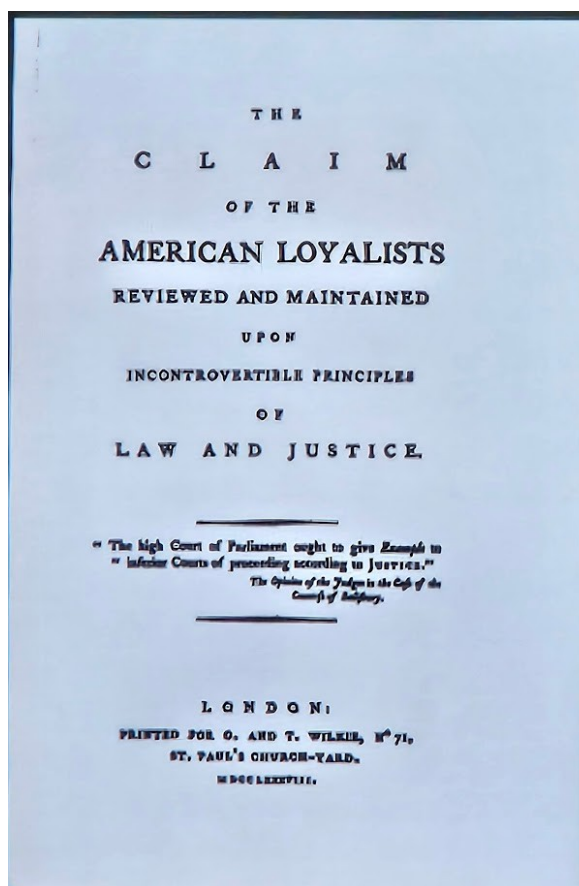
The Albany Committee of Correspondence (also Committee of Safety, Protection and Correspondence) was a Patriot group formed in Albany to coordinate local resistance against British policies. Originally operating in secret, the group galvanized the region and took full control of local governance following the Battles of Lexington and Concord in the spring of 1775.

Their key functions were to act as a de facto government; draft, review, and distribute communications across the thirteen colonies; enforce boycotts and secure goods; suppress Loyalist (or “enemies of the country”, more than 2000 between 1775 and 1781); and to establish subcommittees in 17 local districts to raise local militias. The ef-

forts of the Committee of Correspondence are detailed in bound volumes, as shown in the photo: Minutes of the Albany Committee of Correspondence.

Jonathan noted another excellent source of information about this two year period comes from a likely, but not quite our first thought, source – that from British records. Thousands of colonists, considering themselves to be subject to the King, sought aid from the British government for their losses. Many of these new refugees went to Canada, becoming known and grouped together as Loyalists – loyal to their King.

Jonathan added one last point about documents that delineate those times, and these were the secondary sources. They come from people who wrote their own accounts, even if years later. The massacre of the Strope family in Round Top, yes, our Round Top, is in no official records but recounted in writings af-



ter the fact. The kidnapping of the Abeel family in Catskill is another event that received notoriety. And many other accounts, sometimes in family lore, tell tales of parents and grandparents that fought for independence from tyranny and for self-governance.

Jonathan finished, maintaining this account was the best he could do in telling how or what Greene County did in the American Revolution. There was not even one grand battle to cast as a central feature of his tale. Hey, Greene County was not even a county then. But that did not change the fact that the citizens of what would become our

country faced what each of the thirteen colonies faced, with the major battles happening south and north and east and west of us.

Jonathan Palmer, thank you for once again providing a worthy topic, especially fitting for this year, but also indicative of the several programs you have provided for the Greenville Local History Group. And I hope I have done justice to the program, allowing those of you attending to recognize the meeting you witnessed, and for those of you not present to catch the major whiffs of information that came wafting out of Jonathan's project this evening.

Jim Albetta, an ardent Ingalside Farm guest, has corresponded with me, and through Paige to me, for years. Here is a reminder what the memories of a past glory can evoke.

Thank you, Jim, for the nostalgia!

Getting to Ingalside (a poem by Jim Albetta)

The car is packed, the sun is bright,
The tank is full and all seems right.
We are on our way to the New York Thruway
Counting license plates from out of state
Hurry up Dad it's getting late
Here it is, exit 20 Saugerties, I just cannot wait
Onto legendary route 32, through Cairo and on through
Past the Game Farm, fields of cows and the old Triple C too
Past Happy Day Farms, Sunnyhill, and the Greenville Drive Inn we flew
The excitement builds as we approach route 81, in anticipation of all the fun
We make the right to Ingalside road, don't forget to honk at Arigali's abode
There is Jerry's house, the tennis court, and the friendly old barn
With my favorite sign saying Ingalside Farm!
My week is just beginning, where is Snoopy and Bruno and last year's friends?
Our softball championship we must defend
But then my heart sinks as I see last week's guests packing their gear
Their kids standing silent wiping away tears
This will be me in a week or maybe two
But that thought fades for so much to do,
reacquainting with old friends our smiles just grew
Summers in Greenville made a city kid's dreams come true

Notes

=== Thank you, Stephanie & Christine, for once again burnishing our reputation of hosting excellent “light refreshments.”

=== Debra updated the audience about: 1- the library gallery, with artist Susan Oehl with likeable material for very inexpensive prices; get in to see them before they are all gone; 2-AAG (Arts Around Greenville) is featuring a Arts in the Park on May 30; come out to support our area artists; 3-the Clematis Garden Club doings and schedule; and finally, 4-the Clematis Plant Sale, on May 30, 9-11, in the plaza parking lot.

=== Don held up the newest magazine of the Greene County Historical Society, the latest change to GCHS publications. Two of the articles were penned by Jonathan Palmer and myself. The magazine is a benefit of GCHS membership, easily found online.

=== Don noted the dental office is completed and open for business at its new site in front of the Town Park. It has moved out of the Tops Plaza and now occupies a parcel of land that has attracted everyone’s attention.

=== It was quite the pleasure to see Holger Wrede with whom I crossed paths this past spring. Holger has the distinction of attending some of the earlier GLHG meetings; the last time I had seen Holger, until this past month, was 1990 at a few GLHG meetings!

=== Don noted the passing of Arlene Brown, one of the original founding members of GLHG in 1989 and the last of local members. Only June Clark comes to mind as one of the last surviving member but she would have a lengthy trip from England to make meetings. (A recheck shows that Bonnie Persico and Dave Dively also started with the group.)

June Program

Before I explain, I am announcing the June program is:

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Part I: Who are the Nortons of Norton Hill? and Part II: “Greenville as seen by the 1925 Census.” A whiff of Part III, a new historical marker at the Locust Cemetery, will be detailed later.

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Originally, the census program was the only feature but two incoming research pieces came onto my radar. One of them will be featured in June, and the other will be introduced in June and written and talked about more fully as the year goes on.

Noel Reese has researched his family tree and discovered that one branch included the Nortons from Norton Hill. He will take twenty minutes to describe his torturous genealogy pathway and then the documentation to create his Norton Chapter.

The historical marker angle came from Garth Bryant. He, and a few others, are involved with a new historical marker that will be installed at the Locust Cemetery later this year. It appears that at least nine residents buried at Locust Cemetery were American Revolution veterans. Garth has documented the military details. Other people involved with the historical marker are Joe Sicluna, Noel Reese (mentioned earlier), Paige Ingalls, and myself. The marker may well make an appearance in Porcupine Soup as well as the local Facebook pages.

The names of the nine vets are: Joseph Ingalls, Jacob Ingalls, Captain Daniel Norton, Jr, Jonathan Stokes, David Morse, Ambrose Norton, Captain Abram Post, Jehiel Lamb, and Jacob Bogardus. More explanation at the meeting.