

Warrensburgh Historical Society Quarterly

Volume 19 Issue 1

Spring 2014

Birling* Down the River

By John T. Hastings

One of the first river drives or the movement of logs down the Schroon River occurred in 1813. River driving on the Hudson, Schroon, Sacandaga and other rivers in the Adirondacks would blossom in the late 1800s when millions of markets** of timber would be transported to the mills downstream. Eventually the use of rivers to move forest products was limited to pulpwood, as other means such as trucks and railroads became more prominent. The last river drive on the Hudson River took place in 1950 and was conducted by Finch, Pruyn & Company of Glens Falls.

The Fox brothers were pioneer lumbermen and active in the upper reaches of the Hudson River Valley for over 100 years. Five sons of Daniel Fox served during the American Revolution. The youngest of the five brothers, Jehiel, served in the Albany County Militia and

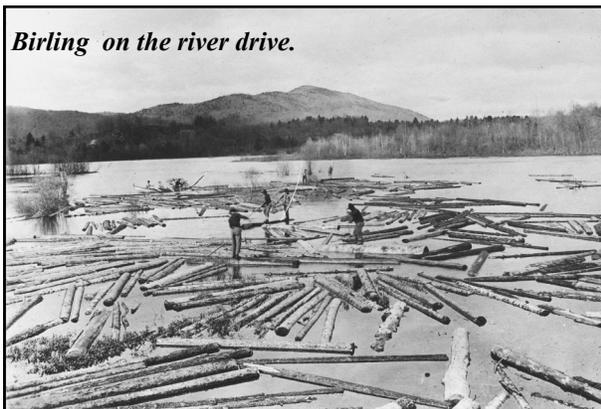
shortly after the war he moved to Hoosick Falls (1784) and then to the Town of Chester in 1797. With him was his wife of 10 years, Jerusha (Baldwin) and their five children. Jehiel had become an ordained Baptist minister in 1797.

At Chestertown Jehiel quickly established a store and a sawmill, and began timbering the Brant Lake Tract. The sawmill and store served as a funding source for Jehiel in his religious endeavors as a

and cheaper to build the sawmill near the forest since it was easier to haul the lumber than move the felled trees. Once, the timber was cut, the sawmill would be taken down and moved to the next area. At this time the lumberman was not only responsible for the felling of trees, but also the manufacture of the logs into useful products.

In 1813, the Fox Brothers revolutionized the lumber industry. Instead of moving the sawmill farther

and farther into the woods, they began cutting logs into set lengths and using small streams and temporary dams to float logs down to the Schroon and Hudson rivers. The first such log drive occurred from their Brant Lake Tract, down the Schroon River to the mills in Glens Falls.



Birling on the river drive.

circuit rider for nearly 50 Baptist churches. Two of Jehiel's sons followed him into the lumber business, Alanson (1787 - 1829) and Norman (1792 - 1863) and operated as the "Fox Brothers."

Due to the lack of mechanical means to hoist and transport logs, in the early days it was easier

This was the first time that individual logs were floated to the mills, although lumber and timber had been rafted on major rivers for a number of years. In March of that year, New York State passed a law requiring the owner of logs floated in the Hudson River or its tributaries, to put their mark on the log and such mark was

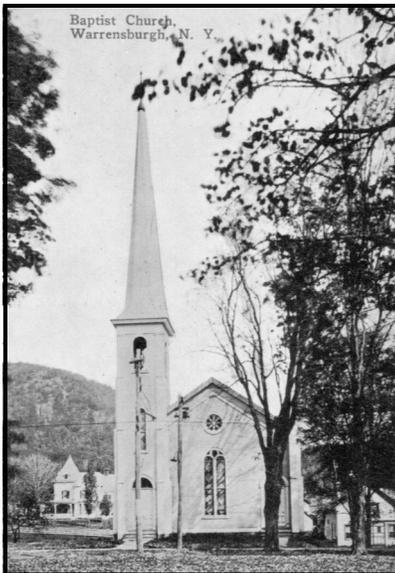
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Calendar of Events

Feb. 27: 7:00 pm
Annual Meeting of Warrensburgh Historical Society at Lizzie Keays Restaurant on River Street.
Desserts and coffee provided.
(Those who wish to dine prior to meeting should arrive by 5:30 pm.)

Mar. 2 through May 11
Special museum exhibit: The Churches of Warrensburgh (Opening Reception with refreshments Sunday, Mar. 2, 1-3 pm)



For more events and details go to: www.warrensburghhistorian.org or call 623-2207.

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We welcome comments, corrections, articles, pictures, letters, and reminiscences. Send to:

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Board of Directors

Gary Bivona: Vice-President, Sandi Parisi: Treasurer, Wendy Peluso: Secretary, Mark Brown, John Cleveland, John Franchini, Jean Hadden, Bob Knowles, Peggy Knowles, Joan West, Donne-Lynn Winslow
Steve Parisi - Museum Director

Note Change

The Board of Directors meets at the Richards Library at 6:30 pm on the **FIRST Wednesday** of each month. Please contact Treasurer Sandi Parisi at 623-2207 to confirm.

Warrensburgh Historical Society Quarterly
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Membership Information

Students \$5.00 Individual \$15.00 Family \$25.00 Senior (62+) \$10.00
Senior Family \$18 Contributing \$55.00 Business \$50.00 Life (Individual only) \$300 (membership is on a calendar year basis)

If you would like to join and receive the Quarterly by mail, please send a check for the amount of the membership classification, with name, address, and phone number to: **Warrensburgh Historical Society, P.O. Box 441, Warrensburgh, N.Y. 12885**

Contributors to this issue:
Paul Gilchrist

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP: 212

Welcome

New Members:

Carrie Winslow, Robin Mahler, Elaine Cowin & Mike Sullivan, Dave Hastings, Carlton Griffin, Arlene Harrington, John Mariani, Ann Marie Richards, Angela Davis, Kimberly LeCount, Deli & Meat Store of the North, and Bob Bradley

Winter Museum Hours

Wednesdays, 12 to 4 pm and Sundays, 1 to 3 pm. If you are interested in volunteering for as little as two hours a month, please check the schedule on the Society's website (Museum page) or call the director, Steve Parisi at 623-2207. No great knowledge of Warrensburgh or experience is necessary, just a friendly, welcoming personality.

Warrensburgh Historical Society

Website: www.whs12885.org

Email: whs7396@yahoo.com

Visit WHS & Museum of Local History on **Facebook**

Disclaimer

The recording of history is an interpretive and ever changing study. Therefore, the Warrensburgh Historical Society or its Board of Directors or members shall not be held liable for the accuracy or authenticity of the material herein. **We welcome and encourage corrections, comments, and additional information.** The views and opinions expressed in this issue are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Warrensburgh Historical Society

Masthead Photo

This photo is a view looking up Woodward Avenue in Warrensburgh with the Three Sisters Mts. in the background. from the Editor's post card collection.

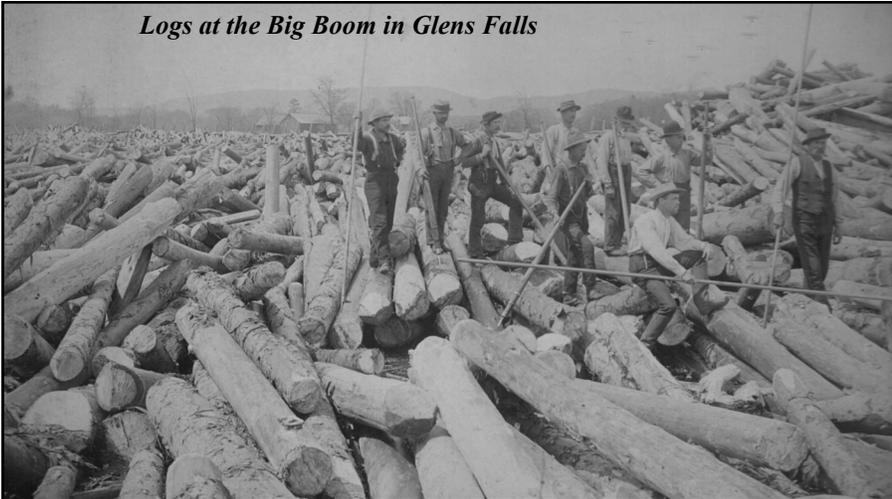
(Continued from page 1) *Birling*

to be recorded by the town clerk of Queensbury. By 1818 more than 17 different log marks (owners) were already in existence and between

Much had to go into the preparations for the river drives. High water was necessary to move the logs, which was dependant on location and weather. Such factors

drive, number of logs, and water conditions. The river drivers would camp out along the river as the drive progressed, with the camp cook with his wagons of food and utensils following along.

The major problem was that of log jams. These occurred often and were sometimes very large in size. Breaking up and relieving the jams was a hazardous situation at best. In 1899 Lawrence Pratt and his crew were breaking up a jam on the Schroon River near the old tannery in Horicon and in April of 1913 a huge log jam formed on the Hudson River between Stony Creek and Thurman, which backed up logs 4.5 miles upstream. Three years later a log jam near Snake Rock (Hudson River near Glen River Campsite) piled up at least 15,000 pieces due to the spring freshet and sudden ice break up. Within the town of Warrensburg log jams were not uncommon. In May of 1905 a log jam formed in the river just above the Hudson Valley Company power station, and was assuming dangerous



1831 and 1849, 230 log marks were registered by the town clerk of Queensbury. In 1850 a cooperating sorting boom was established in Glens Falls and became known as the "Big Boom."

Each spring, usually in March, the lumbermen of the Upper Hudson watershed met at the Finch, Pruyn & Company mill in Glens Falls. Representatives came from the Finch, Pruyn & Company, Kenyon Lumber Company, Union Bag and Paper, and International Paper Company. Reports of the various associations were made, with preparations and coordination of the upcoming river drive. Reports included the volume of timber to be floated to the mills, water conditions due to snow fall, temperatures, etc. and the locations and ease/difficulty of their removal. The associations were for the three river drives on the Hudson, Schroon, and Sacandaga rivers, as well as for the Hudson River Boom. David M. Woodward from A. C. Emerson & Co. was involved with the committee for the Schroon River drive.

as the amount of winter snowfall, warm temperatures to melt the ice and snow, spring rains, and their variations from Glens Falls to the interior areas in the Adirondacks, went into the decision as to when to start the river drive. Small tributary streams were dammed, with water being released

as the drive moved by. Often the river drive would be suspended or terminated for the year due to low water. As such, some logs could take 1, 2, 3, or more years to reach their destination.

However, with good water conditions, logs could be moved .5 to 3 miles per day, with the average being 1-2 miles. Most drives would start in April and continue until June or July and occasionally later, depending on the length of the



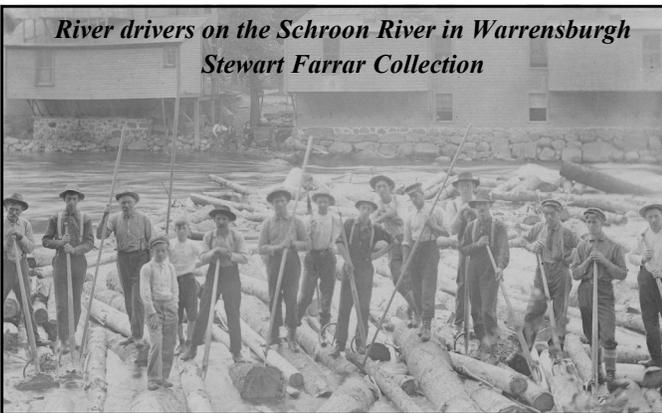
proportions when it was broken up by the river drivers of A. C. Emerson & Company. In June of 1919 a large number of logs were hung up between the sawmill (Emerson) and Woolen Mill dams, with little likelihood of their immediate removal due to low

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water conditions. In 1922 a huge log jam formed above the Osborne Bridge and threatened the structure and other dams downstream. Two years later in July of 1924 the river was "plugged" with logs from the Woolen Mill dam to a point somewhere north of the village. This was preventing boating, bathing and fishing in this section of the river and resulted in numerous complaints from boarding houses, residents and many others. Again, low water was the source of the problem.

During the "off season" work was done to try and alleviate problem



*River drivers on the Schroon River in Warrensburg
Stewart Farrar Collection*

areas on the Schroon River. In the fall of 1897 Lawrence Pratt and a number of men were blasting out some of the large rocks in the channel just below A. C. Emerson's mill "to facilitate their work next spring." Then again in 1906 (August), Lawrence Pratt and a gang of men were blasting rocks from the river bed near Emerson's dam to make the way smoother for the passage of logs in the spring. Later, in 1914, seven river men spent an afternoon just above the (Warrensburg) shirt factory removing old timbers and other debris which had obstructed the floating of logs.

In most cases a crew of river drivers did not move the logs all the

way from the source to the mill. Usually one crew, often consisting of 30-40 men, would move the logs along one section of the river or a tributary to the river, and sometimes return to move a second drive along the same section. For example, in April of 1903 the following drives were in operation; Hudson River drive No. 1 started at the mouth of the Cedar River with Jesse Pratt (Indian Lake) as the foreman; Hudson River drive No. 2 started at the mouth of the Boreas River with John Donohue the foreman; Hudson River No. 3 was run by Thomas Coyle (Thurman) who was putting logs in between The Glen and mouth of the Schroon

River; and the Union Bag and Paper Company had two drives on the Cedar River. Other drives included Thirty-four and Rock Lake, Tyrrell Pond and O'Neil (Flow), Indian River drive, and the Finch, Pruyn log drives run by P. R. Ordway.

Some of the major local foremen for these river drives were Lawrence Pratt, Thomas Coyle, John "Jack" Donohue, Ashley Kellogg, Oscar Ordway, and John H. Stone.

John H. Stone (abt 1836 - 1905) was active in river drives on both the Hudson and Schroon Rivers. In the early 1890s he was working for the Hudson River Pulp and Paper Company at Palmers Falls (Corinth). Duties included measuring and marking logs, installing the Palmers Falls boom (1890), as well as conducting river drives. He was in charge of many

of the river drives on the Schroon in the early 1890s and was known to do work for A. C. Emerson, often assisted by local residents John and Jim Keays, Alfred Duell, Mont. Cilley, William Fuller, and Sam Harrington. He married Nancy Collar (abt 1840 - 1899) of Johnsbury around 1856-58. Children included sons William, Jesse, and Joseph, as well as a daughter Jennie (Jane) (Mrs. Richard Cowles). He was a 50+ year member of the Warrensburg I.O.O.F. Lodge (#355 & 488) and died in May of 1905.

In 1896 Lawrence Pratt took over the log drives on the Schroon River, most of which were for A. C. Emerson. He would continue as foreman of these drives for most of the years until 1931 (Michael McCarthy was in charge for a few years around the time of World War 1). Lawrence was the son of Thomas and Sarah (Vincent) Pratt and was born on May 13, 1857. Lawrence Pratt and Adeline (Cilley) Pratt adopted two boys, Franklin Fayette Middleton & Charles Marshey. Both took the Pratt surname. Frank Pratt married Clara Fedelia Pratt (not directly related). They had three daughters: (1) Ethel Edith Pratt who married Kenneth Bennett (Children: Lenita, Joan & Franklin); (2) Irene Ruth Adeline Pratt who married Clarence Turner (Children: Brian, Terry, Cheryl); (3) Leona Isabelle Pratt who married Thomas Swan (Children: Thomas & Robert).

Thomas Coyle was born in Thurman in 1845. Starting around 1892 he began as foreman of the Hudson River log drives from North River to the Big Boom in Glens Falls, and he would continue in this position until at least 1906. He married Mary Shanahan in 1890 and had a sister Annie E. (Smith). He served as Thurman assessor in 1912 and on the Board of Education in 1917. It was shortly after this

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one time ran the Lake House in West



Thomas Coyle with his logging crew

that he moved to Warrensburgh where he died in 1927.

Ashley T. Kellogg was in charge of the log drives on the Hudson River from North Creek to the Big Boom in Glens Falls starting around 1906. He would continue in this position until around 1914. He was born in 1861 in Minerva and moved to Warrensburgh in 1899. He purchased the Warren House (site of New Way Lunch) in 1898 and the adjacent lot and soon thereafter constructed the Kellogg Block, which was later (1906) bought by Joseph Lavine. In 1904 he became a member of the Board of Education. He was elected director of the Glens Falls Trust Company in 1912. Later in life he dealt extensively in real estate and horses. He married Carrie Bissell of Newcomb, and they had four children; Harry, Daisy, and twins Helen and Hazel. His father was Orson Kellogg Sr.

Oscar Ordway was known to handle river drives from North River to Thurman in the early 1890s. Oscar was from Stony Creek and at

Stony Creek. He was born about 1852 and died in 1929. He was at one time employed by Finch, Pruyn & Company and did extensive logging in the Indian Lake and Stony Creek area. Around 1901 he moved to Canada. He had five sons; Henry, Harry, Stanley, Leo and Homer and a daughter Helen (Mrs. Frederick C. Young).

John "Jack" Donohue (1869 - 1940) was in charge of river drives on the upper Hudson area for more than 50 years. He was from North River and was primarily employed by Finch, Pruyn and Company. He had three sons; John, Raymond and Francis and three daughters; Helen, Milda and Mrs. Emmett Higgins. Two brothers also survived him; Patrick (North River) and Dennis (Warrensburgh).

Accidents were common on the drives and falling out of the boat or off a floating log, and into the river often meant certain death. A combination of cold water (hypothermia) and a river full of logs made it almost impossible to get back out of the wa-

ter once you fell in. Russell Carpenter, Frank Ovitt, Patrick Holleran, Napoleon Champagne, Edward Rabiteau, and Lionel Arsenault are known to have had serious accidents or lost their lives working on the local river drives.

Russell Carpenter (1832-1890), great grandfather of Kathryn Woodward Maltbie, was on a river drive about six miles above North River (O. K. Slip Falls), as reported in *The Warrensburgh News* of May 8, 1890: "As he and another driver (Edward Rabiteau) attempted to cross the river to release a jam of logs which had formed on the other side, the current was swift and about half way across, he lost control of his boat and capsized. He retained hold of the boat and clambered to a position on the ruptured bottom of it and rested on his hands and knees sweeping down the river at a terrific pace. The other driver attempted to reach him, but capsized too. As he swept by men along the side of the river attempting to grab him, he was heard to say 'I guess I am gone boys,' and a short distance later disappeared in the water. He was 58 years old at the time and had been a river driver for about forty years." His wife was Asinath (Langworthy), abt. 1830 -1913, and they had four children. His body wasn't recovered until the following January.

Napoleon Champagne lost his life when he lost his balance and fell backwards into the water and being unable to swim, drowned in the swift current. He was working on the Frank King river drive on the Cedar River. He was working on a river jam when the accident happened. He was survived by a daughter, Lulu of Indian Lake and his mother-in-law, Mrs. Seth Thomas of Wevertown.

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(Continued from page 5) *Birling*

Frank Ovitt was the son of Philander Ovitt of Indian Lake and was about 21 when he died in June of 1896. He was on a single log, attempting to cross the Cedar River when the log hit a ledge in the rapids and threw him into the water. He was employed by Finch, Pruyn & Co. at the time of the accident.

Lionel Arsenault, thirty-one, of New Brunswick, Canada, employed as a boatman by Finch, Pruyn & Company, was drowned Sunday, May 24, 1937, when his boat overturned at what is known as Blue Ledge, between Newcomb and North River, during the annual drive of logs. The young Canadian was employed

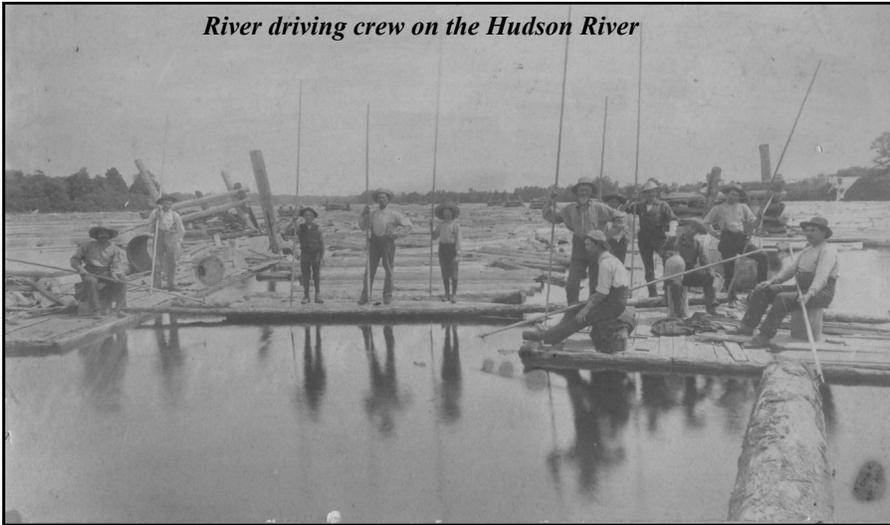
Patrick Holleran, while working with a gang of men trying to break a log jam in the river below the paper mill dam Friday (April 25, 1913), slipped from a log and fell in the water where it was about ten feet deep. Retaining his hold on a peavey he went to the bottom. He came up between two logs and tried to grasp them but made another trip down. His companions attempted to reach him, but were unable to do so until he reached the surface the second time, when they succeeded in rescuing him from a watery grave. As Mr. Holleran could not swim, he was naturally terrified by his experience.

In May of 1898 Lawrence

save himself from going under the jam or being overpowered by the boat at his back.

By the late 1920s most of the river drives were moving primarily pulpwood down the Hudson and Schroon rivers to the mills in Hudson Falls and Glens Falls. The use of railroads and trucks for hauling, which could be done much of the year, provided a year round supply of wood to the mills. The last log drive on the Hudson occurred in 1950 by Finch, Pruyn & Company. It is unclear when the last river drive took place on the Schroon River, but was most likely by the A. C. Emerson Company, which was known to have drives as late as 1931.

River driving crew on the Hudson River



with a crew of river drivers, of which John Donohue was foreman, and was following the logs along the river. At Blue Ledge, a number of logs jammed and his boat overturned as he attempted to free them. Arsenault was an expert swimmer and it is believed that he struck his head on a log or on the rocks which jutted from the water in the area. Twenty-five men immediately began a search for the body, which was recovered the following Wednesday morning.

Pratt had a close encounter with death. While working in a boat near Emerson's Falls with two other workers, Alfred Duell and John Pratt, the boat capsized. The two other men reached shore without much difficulty, but Mr. Pratt encumbered with heavy clothing, was caught in the swift current and was swept against the log jam, with the boat floating down upon him. He was eventually rescued although nearly exhausted from his efforts to

***Birling** was the logging talent of riding a floating log as it moved and rolled down the river, stream or on a lake. Balance and strength were the key. These loggers wore boots called calked shoes, which had a series of spikes protruding from the bottom for better traction. These could be purchased in 1891 at P. Ryan's located across from the Grand Army House

****A "market log"** was one that was 19" in diameter at the small end and was 13 feet long. It contained approximately 200 board feet of lumber. It is unclear where this measure originated, but it is believed to have started as a result of the lumber markets in New York City. The more common rules for measuring logs are the International 1/4", Scribner and Doyle, although more than 70 log rules exist in the northeast

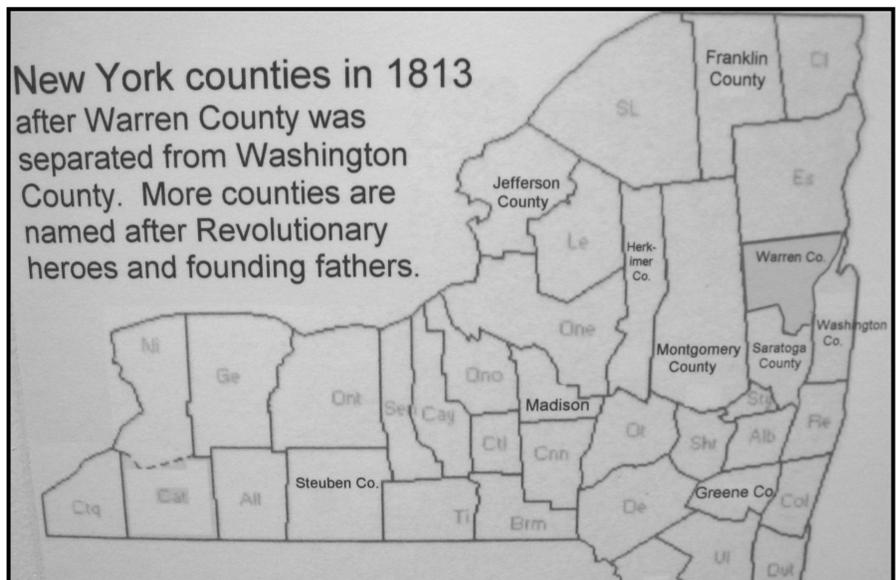
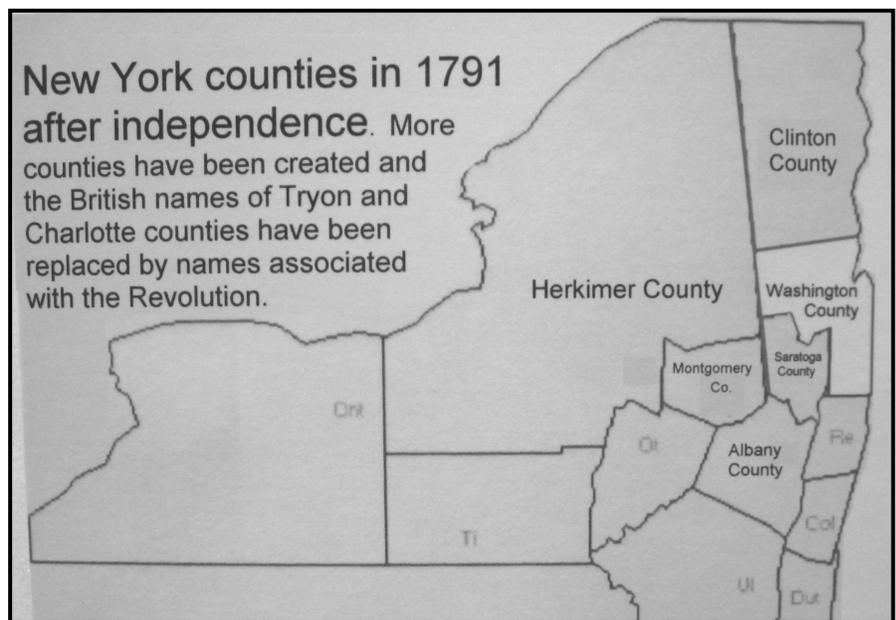
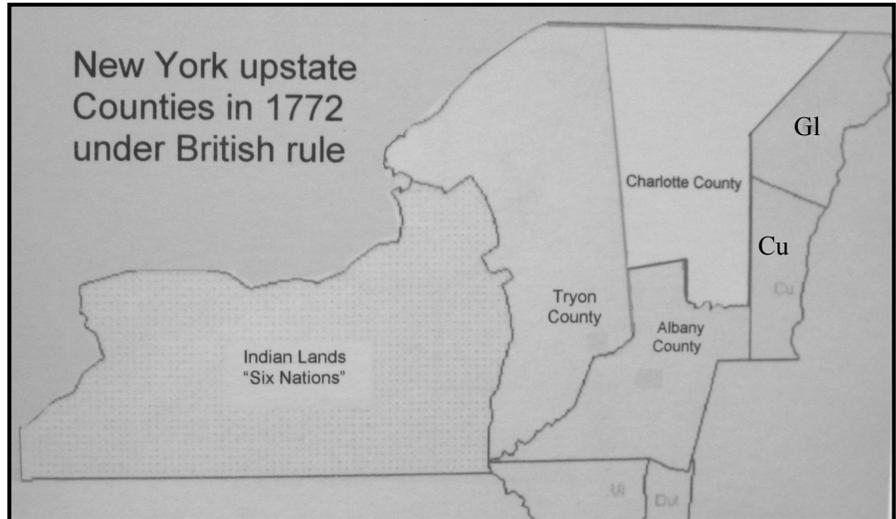
EVOLUTION OF WARREN COUNTY

by Paul Gilchrist

On the eve of the American Revolution, the area that would become Warren County was part of Charlotte County, which, with Albany County, stretched over into what is now Vermont. Note the two other NY counties (Cumberland (Cu) & Gloucester (Gl)) in what is now Vermont.

After the Revolution, as the frontier became safer and population spread northward and westward, additional counties were created to govern the newly settled lands. British names, i.e., Charlotte and Tryon, were rejected and counties were named after heroes of the revolution, founding fathers, and the battle of Saratoga. Warren County was created in 1813, just a few weeks after the Town of Warrensburgh was divided from Thurman (renamed Athol for the next several decades).

Warren County was named for General Joseph Warren, who was killed at the Battle of Bunker (or Breeds) Hill, two months after he sent Paul Revere and W^m Dawes on their midnight rides to warn Samuel Adams and John Hancock in Lexington that the redcoats were coming. It was Joseph Warren who, in Longfellow's poem, hung two lanterns "aloft in the belfry arch of the North Church tower as a signal light" to Paul Revere on the 18th of April in '75.



NOTE:

Due to space limitations, Paul's fourth installment on Climate Change will appear in a later issue.

Museum's Bicentennial Year

February 17 - Bicentennial Exhibit opened, all about people and events of the Town's 200-Year History.

May 18 - Mark Brown talks on Fishing in the Adirondacks.

June 13 - All fourth grade students take a tour of the museum.

June 15 - Burial of ceremonial skeletons used in Odd Fellows rituals, followed by luncheon and the opening of exhibit on Odd Fellows, Rebekahs and Theta Rho.

June 18 - Entire faculty and staff of the Warrensburg School District invited for lunch at museum. More than 50 attended.

July 15 - Planting at Odd Fellows cemetery plot of Thurman Historical Society donation.

July 22 - Reception in memory of Caron Akeley, museum donor.

July 27 - Wilderness Heritage Showcase at Thurman Station.

August 10 - County Rural Heritage Day at Fairgrounds.

Sept. 14 - Tom Davis' Working antique farm machinery show.

Dec. 6 - Dollhouses and Room Boxes Holiday exhibit opened.

Dec. 7-8 - We're dressed for the Holidays and Winter, during Christmas in Warrensburgh.

Dec. 28 - Workshop for Kids, Logging with Dick Nason.



Mystery Photo

Can you identify the location and/or building in the above photo? If so, give John a call at 798-0248 with your answer or email at jthastings@roadrunner.com.

The Mystery Photo in the last Quarterly wasn't much of a mystery. The following people correctly identified it as the Gatehouse/Gatekeeper's Cottage for the Burhans estate; Alice Damp, Judd Smith, Rita Ferraro, Bob Frank, Steve Warne, Alice Maltbie, Kevin Hastings, Patricia Allen-Roberts, Herb Smith, Dan Chamberlain, Sally Cuban, Ben Gurney, George Aubrey, Helen Smith Wallace, M. Betsey Remington and Delbert Chambers.

It's here!

WARRENSBURG, NEW YORK

200 YEARS OF PEOPLE, PLACES AND EVENTS

An encyclopedia of interesting facts published by Warrensburgh Historical Society.

Soft cover, 184 pages, including a 19-page index containing over 2,300 listings. More than 300 photographs.

Retail price: \$19.95

Available at Warrensburgh Museum of Local History or by mail order from Warrensburgh Historical Society, P. O. Box 441, Warrensburg, NY 12885 www.whs12885.org (Postage additional.)

