

Hudson Valley One

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A8 BUSINESS: Hemping & hawing — Honey's Cannabis CBD in Gardiner poised for dispensary license



B1 PLACE: Jocelyn Songco of Yarn Farm Kingston, has picked up a taste for good regional wines and a passion for fiber arts



'TIS THE SEASON: Santa sightings, tree lightings and holiday festivities in Woodstock, Saugerties, Kingston and New Paltz ... *INSIDE*

“The numbers are the numbers”

County service center loses funding

by Rokosz Most

“THANK YOU FOR calling the Ulster County Service Center,” says the lady with the robot voice, “your one-stop for information about county programs and services.”

Questions about dead-deer removal, human trafficking, obtaining a new street address, or making a juvenile firesetter intervention? Anticipating thorny questions is the bread and butter of the operational model over at the Ulster County Recovery Service Center. Or it was.

The service was a well-intentioned relic for gleaning public information, reminiscent of a time when phones had buttons to dial and phone booths had phone books if you needed to know a number to call.

An amendment to eliminate the division from the county's budget for information services passed the Ulster County Legislature on November 30. Prior to that negative vote, \$341,327 of taxpayer funds had been earmarked for the service in the 2023 Ulster County executive budget.

Covid 19? Issues pertaining to county roads? Food or housing assistance or help with the elderly? Mental-health counseling services? Assistance from other county departments?

Press five and further down the branches of the phone tree the caller goes.

With the Internet looking over the county's shoulder, couldn't the money have been better spent elsewhere over the last three years?

“We set up a call center during those first few days of Covid,” says deputy county executive Chris Kelly. “We staffed it with people that were volunteers or we pulled people from departments. Very quickly, that was one of

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COURTESY OF HISTORIC HUGUENOT STREET

Conservator Chloe Houseman from the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts in Philadelphia assesses the condition of historic documents, in 2019, at the Historic Huguenot Street archives.

A digital window of the past widens

A behind-the-scenes look at Historic Huguenot Street's program to digitize thousands of early documents

by Susan DeMark



SUSAN DEMARK

Josephine Bloodgood, Director of Curatorial and Preservation Affairs, and Donna Dixon, Digital Librarian, at Historic Huguenot Street.

DONNA DIXON RECALLS the moment when a bill of sale document was not just a transaction. It was about the reality of two people's lives. The November 23, 1764 bill of sale from one enslaver, James MacLister, to another enslaver, Jareemiah Smith, conveyed — as property — a 27-year-old woman named Page and her 11-month-old child. Dixon looked at how the bill of sale, inscribed neatly using a quill and pot of ink, stated that Page and her child were sold by MacLister and bought by Smith as “Slaves for life sound and well as far as anything yet discovered.” The three words “Slaves for life” especially stood out, as Dixon, the Digital Librarian at Historic Huguenot Street

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Economy | Region

Luminescence

Ribbon-cutting Tuesday morning at RBW factory

by Geddy Sveikauskas

ABOUT TWO MONTHS INTO commencing operations in an elegantly repurposed 100,000-square-foot ex-IBM space, the lighting firm RBW finally held a ribbon-cutting on this rainy Tuesday morning. The multi-million-dollar manufacturing facility paying New York City wages will be headquarters for about 70 employees.

After a profusion of short speeches, state lieutenant governor Antonio Delgado and RBW managing partner Charles Brill, backed by a wide row of distinguished local official personages, used a ceremonial pair of giant scissors to cut a bright ribbon. Cameras clicked. There was a round of applause.

About 75 people were in attendance at the event. Of the 40 seats available in front of the microphoned podium in four neat rows of ten people each with a central aisle, 23, each marked with the insignia of Empire State Development, had been reserved for the assembled officialdom.

Brill mentioned the 300-square-foot

basement space on the Lower East Side where he and his partners, Theo Richardson and Alex Williams, had started the business. The dream, he said, was for the firm to be a maker of lighting. That dream has expanded, he said. Now the goal is to be “a force of good.”

RBW is registered as a public benefit corporation, an unusual form which requires it to give back to the community in various ways.

The pandemic caused RBW to decide to do manufacturing and assembly outside New York City. Shown various spaces by local broker Joe Deegan and encouraged by architect Scott Dutton, the company chose the building at 575 Boice’s Lane next door to iPark87 in the Town of Ulster.

The officials at the podium assured RBW it had made the right choice.

The data now shows that relatively few firms made the kind of decision that RBW made. Most firms leaving New York City in the last few years have chosen industrial locations closer to the Big Apple – Stamford and Norwalk in Connecticut, Westchester County in New York, and northern New Jersey.

As we see the evolution of the impact of hybrid and remote changes in the labor force, however, it is hard to resist the conclusion that RBW was more forward-thinking in its locational choice than most.

It made the best choice.

(CCAHA), in Philadelphia. During an earlier planning grant from the NEH, CCAHA paper conservators examined selected items to assess the collections’ conditions. Now, the professional conservators are doing document treatments, such as cleaning surfaces with a HEPA vacuum and specialized brushes and sponges, mending tears, and removing tape mechanically or with heat and/or solvents.

The word document hardly does justice to the wide array of archival materials from New Paltz’s earliest two-plus centuries of European settlement and

semi-hoarders,” she says with a smile, adding, “They collected and kept so much of their documents.”

To grasp the richness of these archival collections, it’s important to understand the crosscurrents of history from the town’s earliest days of European settlement. As the digital collection’s intro notes, “The story of New Paltz is a nationally significant one, comprising the experiences and stories of Native American, French, Dutch, and African peoples.” The Town of New Paltz was established in 1677, when 12 French Huguenot men and their families, seeking religious freedom and economic opportunity, signed an agreement with sachems of the Esopus-Munsee tribe to live on nearly 40,000 acres of the tribal land.

This introduction to the collection further explains the context: New Paltz’s first European settlers are understood to have been a combination of Huguenots (French-speaking Protestants from France) and Walloons (French-speaking Walloons from present-day Belgium). These French-speaking settlers lived among Dutch-speaking settlers in Hurley for nearly a decade before New Paltz’s establishment. Members of each group did business with each other. Ultimately, they intermarried. Slavery was being practiced under Dutch colonial rule and expanded under British rule, and documented evidence shows that New Paltz’s founding settlers became enslavers from the point of the town’s beginning.

“HHS’s New Paltz project illustrates the fascinating ways in which a small, astonishingly complex Hudson River town perhaps unexpectedly exemplified major features of America’s story, with distinctive and captivating local features,” namely “social life, economy, race, ethnic relations, and religion,” Jon Butler, historian, Yale University pro-



SUSAN DEMARK

The Historic Huguenot Street archives in New Paltz. A National Endowment of Humanities grant will support the preservation and digitization of thousands of documents from early New Paltz history — ranging from the mid-1600s to 1830 — belonging to HHS and three partnering institutions, the Town of New Paltz, the Reformed Church of New Paltz and the Haviland-Heidgerd Historical Collection at Elting Memorial Library. This will allow online access to these documents.

Digital window

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

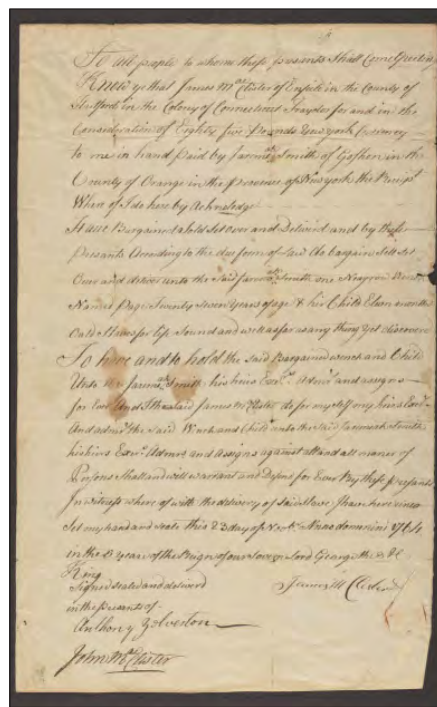
(HHS), remembers. It’s one of those moments when one understands even more deeply just how important it is to conserve such documents, digitize and describe them, and put them online so that many more people will see, learn about and understand them and the history they convey.

Thanks to a major three-year grant of \$349,999 from the National Endowment for the Humanities, this is work that Historic Huguenot Street is conducting, with its archival collection, and with portions of those at four partnering entities — the Haviland-Heidgerd Historical Collection at Elting Memorial Library, the Town of New Paltz and the Reformed Church of New Paltz. The New Paltz Historic Documents project to digitize these archival collections encompasses approximately 8,000 documents (or about 24,000 pages), according to HHS.

“We’ve known for a long time how important these documents are,” says Josephine Bloodgood, Director of Curatorial and Preservation Affairs at HHS, who is leading the project and coordinating with the three partner organizations. The grant, to put it simply, is allowing a comprehensive approach to conserving a priceless trove of early American documents centered in New Paltz and making them far more accessible. This is happening through digitizing the documents, describing, categorizing, annotating the data sets using metadata, and putting the documents online, where the collection will be available for varied audiences and uses. Under the NEH grant, HHS has engaged an Advisory Committee of scholars from universities and other entities to ensure that the highest educational standards are met.

The documents are being uploaded online at New York Heritage Digital Collections, as a collection under the project’s title: New Paltz Historic Documents (<https://nyheritage.org/collections/new-paltz-historic-documents>). The collection is searchable.

As the project proceeds through its second year, HHS has been periodically sharing behind-the-scenes highlights on social media and explaining to the



COURTESY HISTORIC HUGUENOT STREET

This document from November 23, 1764, is for the sale of a 27-year-old enslaved woman, Page, and her infant, to Jeremiah Smith by James MacLister.

While the Haviland-Heidgerd Historical Collection has some parts of its collection online, as does HHS, the number of documents will increase exponentially. “It’s going from somewhat inaccessible to totally accessible,” says Margaret Stanne, Collections Manager at Haviland-Heidgerd.

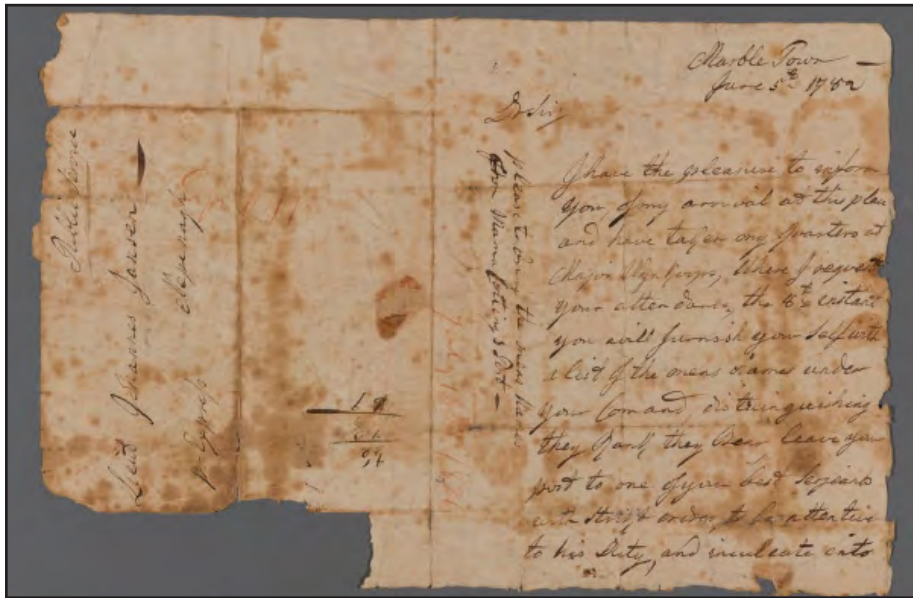
public the painstaking processes of conservation.

Thankfully, the collections are in remarkable condition overall, according to HHS. Still, about 20-30 percent have some type of damage, ranging from mold, discoloration, and brittleness to poor-quality mending or taping, tears, and dirt. As Bloodgood describes the effect of damage, “how do you deal with something that would fall apart if I turned the page?”

Very delicately, to be sure. With grant money, HHS has hired professional consultants from the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts

growth. The Haviland-Heidgerd Collection portion for the project’s years, for instance, includes deeds, account ledgers, wills, inventories, church records, fire department records, maps, and other materials, according to Carol Johnson, Collections Coordinator, who has some 40 years of work and expertise in New Paltz history.

“In New Paltz, it’s incredible that we have so much in terms of documents,” Johnson says. The original families of the Huguenot settlement kept very complete records of varied facets of their lives and subsequent generations kept up this practice. “I think of them as



COURTESY OF HISTORIC HUGUENOT STREET

This June 5, 1782 letter from Colonel Frederick Baron de Weissenfels to Lieutenant Johannes Jansen informs Jansen of his arrival and requests his attendance. He tells Jansen to leave his troops under the command of one of his best sergeants with orders to inculcate into the men's minds "a perfect obedience to him in your absence."

fessor emeritus, and author of *Becoming America: The Revolution Before 1776*, has observed.

Making these New Paltz historical collections more accessible is sure to help expand the knowledge of the day-to-day lives, relationships, and other important facets about women, African descendants who were enslaved in New Paltz, and indigenous people. HHS has done much in recent years to add to the understanding of these long-neglected portions of American history. One example is an exhibit that HHS created about Jane Deyo Wynkoop, one of the first African Americans to purchase land in New Paltz. (It can be accessed at: <https://omeka.hrvh.org/exhibits/show/jane-deyo-wynkoop/introduction>.) In this exhibit, Dixon cites how a single receipt gave evidence of a man named Daniel Van Wagenen requesting "the corn of your negro James," referring to the corn that an enslaved young man, James, grew, providing some evidence that his product was known as high-quality.

Yet, as those at HHS and Elting talk about the New Paltz Historic Documents project, it is evident that their passion is for how the public will have increased access to so much more. While the Haviland-Heidgerd Historical Collection has some parts of its collection online, as does HHS, the number of documents will increase exponentially. "It's going from somewhat inaccessible to totally accessible," says Margaret Stanne, Collections Manager at Haviland-Heidgerd.

As the collections are digitized and placed online, a key challenge will

be spreading the word so that people know about and make use of the New Paltz Historic Documents collection, in the myriad ways that are possible, according to Bloodgood. People already seek help at these institutions for genealogical research, and that is likely to increase even more. Also, Johnson says that more new homeowners in New Paltz are seeking to research the histories of their homes. She laments one unhelpful development: The teaching of local history in schools has become less of a priority than it was before. Still, the digital collection is likely to draw many types of users, such as historians, scholars in other fields, authors, religious groups, and representatives of various communities, and students.

For those involved in the project, it has allowed new discoveries as the documents are digitized. Johnson cites the finding of the earliest large New Paltz map that shows the names of households on it, from 1774. The map was found in a box of deeds. It has also engendered a feeling that a large swath of New Paltz's collections of documents — the items that were found in old closets, attics, office drawers, and such, then categorized carefully, and boxed — are going to be of immense use to a wider audience for many years to come. As Stanne sees it, the digitizing of so much of the town's historic documents will create a "bigger tapestry, a bigger story" of New Paltz.

In Johnson's view, the accessibility is fitting. As she says, "The collection really is the public's. It's not ours."

The numbers

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

our first efforts when the cases started coming."

That was in March 2020, during the first wave of infections. By that summer, the number of cases had begun to fall off significantly. The mission of the hotline began to pivot.

That June, then-county executive Pat Ryan announced the launch of a program conceived as a single point of entry to provide community member support on a wide range of issues and topics. Like 311 in New York City, one telephone number would have all the answers.

"The function stayed largely the same with a lower call volume during that summer," recalled Kelly. "And while the vaccine production seemed to be coming to fruition, we started gearing up for vaccines and re-examining what our role would be. And boom! We got hammered with that next wave."

As the number of Covid cases soared again, the various vaccines which hit the American market were not necessarily available. Limited quantities, prioritized waiting lists, and erratic distribution by the federal government contributed to the confusion. There were more questions than answers, and more people asking than could be answered.

"Eight thousand calls in a single day, just on vaccines," said Kelly. "It's not even hyperbole. I just remember that was the light at the end of the tunnel we saw and then we got overwhelmed."

The next wave rose and fell through the winter, and by the next spring the numbers of infection dropped off as the weather warmed.

At the end of 2021, instead of looking into the county taxpayers' pockets for loose change, \$310,325 in ARPA funds was identified to pay the center's operating expenses as a pilot program.

As the pandemic attenuated down to an endemic this year, the recovery service center tried to expand beyond the guardrails of its original mission, perhaps explaining the nine percent bump in the pricetag projected for 2023.

Comparing the service center with a startup, director of information services for Ulster County Alan Macaluso described significant steps being taken to provide users of the service multiple channels to find answers via a website, knowledge-based articles, FAQs, live chat and text services currently in de-

velopment.

On November 22, a week before the legislative meeting on the 2023 budget, an audit report from the county comptroller's office was less than impressed with what it discovered. It said that the service center was no longer operating in an efficient and effective way.

The report said that during 2022 the call volume for the service center during 2022 had dropped from 6723 calls in January to just 478 calls in October, a reduction which caused the average cost per call to rise from \$11.01 to \$39.15 per call.

"While our county residents are facing difficult times," said county comptroller March Gallagher, "it is more important than ever to consider how effectively we are using available funding to address public needs."

In a memorandum responding to the comptroller's findings, Macaluso resisted the portrait presented in the audit. Citing two non-health-crisis-related events which had increased volume to the service center in the past year, Macaluso took issue with the assertion that heavy call volume occurred only during a health crisis.

Macaluso was referring to the February 4 ice storm which found the City of Kingston under glass for 48 hours, and to Central Hudson billing irregularities thus autumn which resulted in widespread anxiety throughout the region.

Macaluso argued that the program offered a tremendous benefit to the residents of Ulster County by providing a central hub for residents using multiple channels of access to request information. But he recognized that the incoming phone calls to all county departments couldn't be answered by four individuals. The service center has a staff of four, consisting of two management-level employees and two customer service representatives.

"What is being said now, the comptroller's report, the numbers are the numbers," said Kelly. "When you're speaking public dollars, there's going to be a higher level of scrutiny as to how much you spend."

"It's not that anyone is saying everything's a failure here. The investment in the learning over three years, this money will not go to waste. We've made a lot of really good headway in how we approach the constituents. How do we make this done in an efficient way that respects those dollars spent? I think that as government we all have a duty to provide services going forward."

Briefly noted | Kingston

Kingston Snowflake Festival

THE SNOWFLAKE FESTIVAL RETURNED ON FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2, IN uptown Kingston and set an exciting stage to welcome Santa with a wide range of free activities for visitors of all ages. The dazzling entertainment included a band on stilts, a comedian juggler, a flame eater, ice sculptures, holiday carolers, youth group fiddlers, campfire s'mores, horse-drawn carriage rides and more. The festival also included numerous open houses at businesses, decked out for the holidays and offering complimentary treats.



The Shinbone Alley Stilt Band.



Left, carolers entertaining the crowd before Santa arrived; right, Charlie Whittaker of Catskill and Trinko.



PHOTOS BY PHYLLIS MCCABE



Left, Rhya Seda, age 4, and her father meet the Grinch; right, Santa greeted children and families at the Senate House barn.

