



PITTSTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER ♪ Issue XXXVII ♪ Spring, 2020

Pittstown During the American Revolution

By Chris Kelly, town historian of Schaghticoke

Looking through the past issues of the Pittstown Historical Society newsletter, there have been several articles about various people involved in the American Revolution - on both sides - who lived in Pittstown. I would like to add to the topic from a slightly different slant by discussing what it was like for people who lived in the area and how they were involved in the conflict. At the time, the "Schaghticoke District" included the area which would become the towns of Pittstown and Schaghticoke after the war. It was part of Albany County and was different from much of what would become Rensselaer County in 1790 as it was just outside the Manor of Rensselaerswyck. Schaghticoke itself was divided in two parts: the area around the current Knickerbocker Mansion was the Albany Corporation lands, actually owned by the city of Albany and rented to the farmers who lived there (including the Knickerbockers), and the rest, including what would become Pittstown, where people could own their land.

The Revolution was our first Civil War. Just think how you would feel now if over the course of a few months you were expected to abandon your long-time support of your King and country and transfer allegiance to a rudimentary and untested new country with no money and tenuous leadership, plus fight in a war to become independent. This was a difficult and fraught time for everyone. *(Continued on Page 2)*

August 6, 1779 document directing Pittstown and Schaghticoke men to provide pairs of shoes and stockings to outfit militia troops (see transcription on page 3)

Schaghticoke August the 6th 1779
You are hereby Directed to Collect and Notify every Person here
under written the Names of Shoes or Stockings to their names
on next and Return the same on or before the first Day of
November and for your so doing this shall be your
Sufficient warrant

<i>Mile Overacher 1 Pair Stockings</i>	<i>Jacob Alenfinger 1 Pair of Shoes</i>
<i>Garry witchal 20</i>	<i>Recompence Smith 20</i>
<i>Ramont Shepperly 20</i>	<i>Michael Smith 20</i>
<i>Hoozer Rose 20</i>	<i>Henry Vanderhoof 20</i>
<i>Samuel Kauland 20</i>	<i>Jacob Harman 20</i>
<i>Thomas Douglas 20</i>	
<i>Thomas O'Williams 20</i>	
<i>Jacob Hallenbake 20</i>	
<i>Garry Sisco 20</i>	
<i>Mile Hook 20</i>	
<i>Andrew Dines 20</i>	

For Samuel Hitcham Collector

John Hunscherbader Jr. Captain
Thomas Hallett
Jesse Gifford
Wendel Overacher
Heck Overacher
Harmon Grovesbeck



Colonial Militia Men by Randy Steele

(Continued from Page 1) In 1775, Schaghticoke was a sparsely populated region of mostly farmers on the frontier between British America and French Canada. Citizens remembered French and Indian raids from the North, and much of the fighting in the French and Indian Wars had occurred in the Lake George/Ticonderoga region. Local men had served in the colonial militia. There was a small fort near the current Knickerbocker Mansion which was made of logs and was in poor condition, but it had not been garrisoned for some years. There was no center of population in the district beyond the occasional mill, tavern, or church (the Dutch Reformed by the Knickerbocker Mansion and the Lutheran near the junction of Valley Falls Road and North Line Drive). Certainly there were no stores, governmental buildings or schools. There was a village at Lansingburgh, but Albany was a long ride or sail away.

When the Revolution began, the former colony of New York set up a provincial Congress on a statewide basis and Committees of Correspondence for the counties. It is not clear from reading the minutes of the Albany committee how the representatives were chosen. The men met about every two weeks, generally in Albany, developing a new government and organizing to fight a war. The minutes of the committee began in January, 1775, with an oath of secrecy and loyalty. John Knickerbocker, Jr. and John Wandelaer, both residents of the Albany Corporation lands, were the first representatives of Schaghticoke. From the minutes I have read, they concentrated on supporting the war with men and materiel and discovering those disloyal to the Revolution. Michael Overocker, Samuel Ketchum, and Michael Vandercook of Pittstown soon began representing the Schaghticoke district. John Knickerbocker, Jr. became the first Colonel of the local militia regiment, the 14th Albany.

A sub-committee of the Committee of Correspondence was the Commission for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies. Their task was to root out Loyalist or Tory activity in the county. Over the course of the war, a number of men were accused of supporting the enemy or being lukewarm in their support of the Revolution. In one meeting in 1779, Peter Yates, who had taken over as Colonel of the 14th Albany County Militia, told the Committee of Correspondence that several strangers had moved into town who had collected cattle for the British army at the time of the battle of Saratoga in 1777, and that “those persons daily obstruct the execution of the orders of the militia officers”. The men included a couple who became prominent members of the post-war community, so apparently the accusations came to nothing. Yates also charged that a young man who was due to become a Lieutenant in the regiment, Jacob Hallenbeck, was “an enemy to the American Cause”. As he is on the list of lieutenants, this must also have been disproven.

In July 1779, Joseph Jadwin, a “yeoman of Schatikoke”, put up bail for a fellow citizen, William Flood, who had been in jail, as he “might prove dangerous to the Safety of the State”, stating that he would keep him on his farm and guarantee his good behavior. Jadwin is on the list of soldiers in the 14th Albany County Militia.

In one interchange at a meeting of the Committee of Correspondence in 1781, Lt. Jonathan Brown, who was from Pittstown, was directed to arrest Simeon Smith of “Pits Town”, innkeeper, on the charge that he “entertains disaffected persons, drink’s King George’s health and speaks disrespectfully of the authority of this state”. Smith appeared before the Committee with Brown and was released after posting 100 pounds bail and being examined by the Committee on Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies. I must note that Simeon appears on the list of men who served in the local militia unit during the war. He was brought in on the testimony of another resident, Samuel Stringer, who was another member of the Committee of Correspondence.

It seems that the men from the Schaghticoke district who served on the Committee of Correspondence acted as a local government, at least for prosecution of the war. The town of Schaghticoke owns a wonderful document titled “*Schatckook, August the 6th, 1779*” listing persons who were to provide either a pair of stockings or shoes for the troops by the 1st of November. Samuel Ketcham, who along with relatives Abijah, James, Daniel, and William Ketcham, was listed as a 14th Albany County Militia soldier, was the collector. John Knickerbacker and Harman Groesbeck of Schaghticoke along with residents of future Pittstown, Wendel and Michael Overacker, Thomas

Halstead, and Joseph Gifford, all signed the paper as those ordering the donation. Those on the list of donors of stockings included Michael Overacker himself, along with ten others. The five donors of shoes included Michael Cook, Jr. (Michael Vandercook), eldest son of the original Michael and founder of Cooksboro, and Henry Vanderhoof, one of the Captains of the 14th. In October of 1779, the fledgling Legislature of the State of New York assessed the property value of all landowners, preparatory to taxation, aiming at raising \$2,500,000 statewide. The military had to be outfitted, fed, and paid, and government officials at the local, state, and national level compensated for their time and travel.

I have mentioned the local unit of the Albany County militia in the Schaghticoke district, the 14th. It also included men from the district of Hoosick. Much like today, every man between the ages of 18 and 45 was considered a member of the militia. On October 20, 1775 John Knickerbocker was appointed the Colonel of the Regiment, which included forty-six officers and 684 men. They were divided into seven companies and a company of “Minute Men,” who presumably would be called on first in an emergency. We know the names of many of the men who served in the 14th Albany Militia, thanks to published compilations of records of the new state of New York. When the men were called to duty, they would have worn their own clothes and brought their own weapons. One of Colonel Knickerbocker’s tasks was to obtain ammunition and food for his men.

Transcription of document shown on Page 1:

Schateckook August 6th 1779

You are hereby Directed to Collect and Notify Every Person here
under written the Numbers of Shoes or Stockings to their Names.
Connect and return the Same on or before the first Day of
November Nekt and for your So doing this Shall Be your ---
Sufficient warrant

Micle Overacher **1 Pair Stockens** Jacob A Lansingh **1 Pair Shoes**

Jurry Witchal Do Recompence Smith Do

Garret Sipperly Do Mickel Cook [?] Do

Kasper Rose Do Henry Vanderhoof Do

Samual Rowland Do Jacob Harmon Do

Thomas Duglas Do

For Samuel Ketcham Collector

Thomas P Williams Do John Knickerbacher Jr. Chair.

Jacob Hallenbake Do Thomas Halsted

Yancy Sisco Do Joseph Gifford

Micle Cook Do Tendel Overacker

Andrew Diver Do Micle Overacker

Harmen Groesbeck

We also know what the 14th Albany did during the war thanks to the pension applications of some of its members. In general, the men were civilians who were called out as needed, usually for four to six weeks a year from 1775 to 1781. Not all would be called out or “drafted” at once, and apparently if enough volunteers responded to the calls, the others could stay at home. Since virtually all of these men were farmers, and some were men with families, it could definitely be a hardship to be called to service, especially if it was every year. It is also important to note that many of the men were neighbors and/or relatives and knew each other well.

Men could only begin applying for pensions based on Revolutionary War service in 1818, if indigent, or in 1832. So these applicants were elderly men. Almost none of them had any sort of paperwork confirming their service, so they submitted lengthy descriptions of what they did, along with testimony from friends and family members who could confirm it. In the case of widows’ pensions, the widows also had to prove their marriages, a great boon to modern genealogists.

Let’s look a little closer at some of the men from what is now Pittstown who were involved in this rudimentary government and in the military. Michael Overacker, member of the Committee of Correspondence and signatory on the list demanding shoes and stockings, (*continued on Page 4*) Page 3

(Continued from Page 3) was born in what is now Germany around 1720. He immigrated to Dutchess County as a young man with other members of his family. Michael married Anna Barbara Stover, and their eight children were born in Beekman in Dutchess County. Michael and Anna and a number of their children moved to the Schaghticoke district in 1771 or 1772. Michael immediately became involved in his community, and his election to the Committee of Correspondence in 1775 is a measure of the respect which his new neighbors held for him. Michael died in 1787.

Michael's son, Wendel (1758-1834), a signatory on the committee soliciting shoes and stockings, was also a soldier in the 14th Albany County Militia, a Private in Captain Vanderhoof's company. His 1832 pension application explained that he became a soldier in 1775 and served two months that year, marching to Montreal and back. In August, 1776, he was drafted for one month and marched to Fort Edward. This was a common destination for men from the 14th. The fort needed to be maintained and garrisoned.

In 1777, the year that the British invaded from Canada, he was drafted again for a month, apparently in late spring. He marched again to Fort Edward and on to Fort George and back. He had only been home a few days when one half of the whole regiment was called out again. Wendel volunteered and marched first back to Fort Edward, then on to Fort George, then back to Fort Edward, where General Schuyler was in command. He then moved back to Stillwater and Half Moon, near the junction with the Mohawk, where General Gates was commanding. This is where troops were gathering to oppose the advance of General Burgoyne and the British army. From there he went back to Stillwater and on to Bemis Heights, where he was for two weeks, knowing that Burgoyne was close by. Burgoyne surrendered October 17th, and Wendel was dismissed for the short trip home two weeks later. Wendel was in service basically from May to October.

Another Pittstown soldier, Cornelius Francisco, was in the same company, although he may have served a bit more than Wendel, and certainly added more details. He said that the time at Fort Edward in 1775 was spent "guarding the frontier against the Tories and Indians". In 1776, he marched to Sandy Hill and built a "causeway" between Fort Ann and Fort Edward for two months, and later worked on "erecting a breastwork" at Fort Edward. In the run-up to Saratoga in 1777, he spent six weeks in the spring guarding supplies at Stillwater, then marched to Fort George. When the British under Burgoyne took Fort Ticonderoga in July, he retreated to Fort Edward, "Burgoyne pursuing", then to Fort Miller, where they were attacked by the Indians. They retreated back to Saratoga, when he and his company were sent to Pittstown to "remove and guard the inhabitants". He got to stay there through the battles.

Returning to Wendel Overocker - he testified that he served a couple of other months in the years after Saratoga, but was unable to remember the dates. He married Anny in 1779. Sometime after the war they moved to Otsego County, then on to the town of Davenport in Delaware County, and finally to Dryden in Tompkins County. Wendell was credited with nine months service and received a pension of \$30 per year, as did Anny after his death.

Wendel's brother Adam, born in 1761, also served in the 14th Albany. In his pension application he first stated that he had begun serving in the fall of 1778, then was called to duty about a month every summer until the end of the war. He added that he had been at the battle of Saratoga in 1777 like his brother, but as he would have been just 16 at the time, that is doubtful. He first married Cornelia Vandercook, a daughter of Michael Vandercook. After her death in about 1810 in either western NY or Ohio, he moved on to Michigan, where he married a widow named Patience Herrington. He began collecting a pension of \$80 a year in 1832. After his death in 1842, Patience continued to collect the pension until her death in 1872!!!!!!

Michael Vandercook (1715-1786) and his wife Cornelia VanNess (1722-1780) were from New Jersey. They and their large family moved to what became Cooksboro about 1763. Like Michael Overacker, Vandercook came to town as a mature and well-off man. His neighbors clearly recognized his importance and capability in electing him to the Committee of Correspondence. Besides farming Page 4

he had a grist mill on the Deep Kill. His sons Michael, Simon, Henry, and Cornelius all served in the 14th Albany County Militia. Simon's son, Michael, provided testimony as to the service and veracity in the 1832 pension applications of many of the Pittstown veterans.

Michael's tombstone in the Old Cooksborough Cemetery has a long inscription in Dutch, now illegible. According to the descendant who added it and a translation on Find-a-Grave, part of the inscription reads: "The above sage was a firm friend to the liberties of this country in 1776, by which he lost the better part of his prosperity, and in July 1777 he had his home robbed and his life threatened by some of the British King's robbers while his sons and the rest of the military were gone to the Northward to oppose Burgoyne, as also by the depreciation of the then currency, all of which he bore with Christian fortitude." This puts the local problems in a nut shell.

I wish I could find out more about Captain Henry Vanderhoof, who was the Captain listed in many of the pension papers of Pittstown soldiers of the 14th Albany County Militia. Schaghticoke resident Bill Morris, who has done a great deal of deed research in the Cooksboro area, believes that Captain Vanderhoof's farm was near Bill's home on North Pole Road. Captain Vanderhoof and his wife, Sara Francisco, had come to the Schaghticoke district from the same town in New Jersey as the Vandercooks and bought land near the Vandercooks.

According to Ronald Bachman in the book, "*A Fine Commanding Presence*", Captain Vanderhoof was born in 1725, serving as Captain as a rather elderly man. Both Vanderhoofs died about 1810. There were many Franciscos in Pittstown at the same time, twelve men with that surname serving in the 14th Albany. I mentioned one of them, Cornelius, above. Several of these Franciscos were brothers, and they had also come from the same town in New Jersey as the Vandercooks. These families all intermarried.

Certainly the atmosphere in the district of Schaghticoke must have been unsettled all during the war. At first there would have been the uncertainty of who was in charge with the British government gone, also the concern as to who still supported the British and who the new Americans. How many neighbors were suspicious of each other and their feelings about the war? How toxic would it have been if neighbors could accuse neighbors of being traitors?

The summer of 1777 was particularly dangerous in the area. By the time of the first battle of Saratoga in September, many residents had evacuated to Albany, while others gathered near the rudimentary fort near the Knickerbacker home. There were local militia men and others from New England assigned to protect the civilians left at home from the marauding Indians and Tories. But many of the men had been called to duty with the militia, some leaving wives and small children at home. As Michael Vandercook's tombstone reports, there were raids by the British, and I would add by their Indian allies. Two farmers who had taken refuge at the fort in Schaghticoke were murdered by Indians when they left to check on their property in August, 1777. And Major Dirck VanVechten of the 14th Albany, a farmer on the Albany Corporation lands, was killed and scalped by Indians when he tried to check on his property.

Farm work still needed to be done or there would be famine in the winter. Other militias from New England marched through town on the way to Saratoga, certainly damaging crops and fences on the way. On the other hand, local millers, Toll and Jadwin, seized the opportunity and sold flour to the American Army. But as Vandercook's tombstone testifies, the new government had big financial problems, and the new currency was shaky. After the surrender in October, (*continued on Page 6*) Page 5



(continued from Page 5) Burgoyne's Army, now prisoners of war, crossed the Hudson at Stillwater and was marched through town to Boston, doing more damage. At least the local militia men did not have far to go when they were released from duty.

The immediate danger from the British was gone after 1777, but the area remained on the border of British territory and was still dangerous. Militia men were called out yearly for a month to six weeks until the end of the war, sometimes just as far as Saratoga, sometimes farther afield, certainly creating problems in maintaining their farms and families. At least most men did serve relatively close to home. Of course they walked everywhere they went. (For map of the campaign and other information, visit Chris Kelly's Blog at www.schaghticokehistory.wordpress.com)

Then after the war was finally over, this area was part of the disputed territory with Vermont. Matters came to a head in the summer of 1781, when the 14th Albany County Militia garrisoned the fort at Schaghticoke. About 60 local men, including former Captain Henry Vanderhoof, met to elect a Governor for Vermont, and there was a confrontation between the militia and about 200 men from Bennington. Thankfully the dispute was resolved with no bloodshed, and the Vermonters took their case to the new U.S. government, leaving the Schaghticoke district in peace.

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History of the Valley Falls Library

Janet Weber, Trustee

In the fall of 1901 Miss May Parker called a meeting of all who were interested in a free public library in Valley Falls. At that time the village had not even been incorporated. Seven people attended, and committees were appointed to solicit funds. According to notes from the library's history, \$1 was collected to start the fund. Over the next three years not much was done until the winter of 1904-1905 when, through the efforts of the Political Equality Club (now the Women's Club), the Valley Falls Free Library Association was formed. Money was raised, and on January 5, 1907, the library opened with about 250 books in the back of Bert G. Hull's store (where the current post office is located). Miss Bertha Tozier was appointed as librarian with a salary of \$25 a year.

After some time had passed, the idea of a library building caused a letter to be written to the Gaffney Family (former residents) asking them to contribute towards a building for the library. Mr. Gaffney sent a check for \$100 and a promise for more. Meeting with no other success in fund raising, the money was deposited in a bank. After some time had passed, Mr. Gaffney inquired about the progress toward a library building and was told the cost was too great to proceed. Mr. Gaffney then gave \$4,250 toward the building, if a suitable lot could be acquired and the previously donated \$100 would be used toward purchase of such lot.

A lot on the corner of State Street and Lyon Street was purchased from the Lape family for \$600 with a deduction of \$100 donated by Mrs. Lape. (The library now has a photograph of that lot when it was a tennis court.)

Local architect, Louis Milliman, drew up the plans, and the building contract was awarded to Easton, Rising and Worden from Hoosick Falls. All the furnishings were gifted. The librarians chair and desk were given by the Hoosic Valley Musical Association; a large oak table and six chairs were given by the Five Hundred Club (the table and some chairs are still in use today); small rugs were given by Mrs. Ida Crapo; window shades by Mrs. C.A. Sproat; a small table was given by the L.T.L. boys and six chairs were given by the W.C.T.U.

The building was finished and dedicated on September 5th, 1913.

A large white marble plaque listing the names of original board members in gold leaf still hangs in the front of the library. If you look closely, you will notice that "library" is spelled incorrectly.

Probably the cost of another plaque was prohibitive.

Chairs for the early meetings were loaned by the ladies of the Baptist church.

Over the years the library continued to grow offering longer hours and more materials. When Upper Hudson Library Federation was formed, the library joined and began to be able to network with other libraries.

We also received our charter from New York State Department of Education in 1912, which was later re-issued to expand the area served to include the entire Town of Pittstown and areas surrounding the Village.

After the central sewer line was installed in the village, the library was at last able to have a well dug and provide restroom facilities for staff and patrons.

No one is sure when we acquired the honor roll monument in front of the library, but it was probably moved there when work was done to change the location of the bridge. The monument originally sat near the corner of State Street and NYS Route 67.

Valley Falls Library's New Wing



By Jeanette Sassatelli, Trustee

The Valley Falls expansion was a long dreamed about project to enable accessibility for all patrons to our historic library. Through an incredibly generous donation from the Johnsonville Volunteer Ambulance Service, a grant from New York State through the upper Hudson Library System and over \$100,000 of unbelievable donations from the community, we were able to make this a reality. The new design includes another 1,500 square feet of space, allowing for more delineated areas for children's activities and meeting and reading areas, as well as some long-awaited bathrooms!

We invite all to come to the library to see your community new space!



Trustees of the Valley Falls Library at the opening of the expansion of November 23, 2019.

From left to right: Susan Stover; Janet Weber; Gail Madigan; Julia Weston; Ralph Marino; Marcia Geren; Kelly Akin (Library Director); Dale Akin; Lynn Keyes Brown; Jeanette Sassatelli

The Campbell Family and the Campbell Farm

By Neysa Garrett (great-great-great-granddaughter of James Campbell, Sr.)

James Campbell

James Campbell, born in 1789 in Henniker, NH, came down to Pittstown as a young man, and was first documented as being there in 1810. His parents, John Campbell and Elizabeth “Betsey” Moore, lived in the area originally known as Nutfield which was first settled in 1719 by a Scots Irish migration. Although they and their neighbors had been away from Scotland for many generations, the Campbells grew up in an area of Scotsmen. They were farmers and Presbyterians; James’ father, John, was a veteran of the American Revolution, as was his grandfather, Robert Moore.

“John Campbell was a farmer and blacksmith and when news came of the advance of the British, he left his anvil, with his leather apron on, to enlist. He with two brothers went from Ashworth or Londonderry, New Hampshire in the early part of the war...” *Helen Fisher, DAR application*

At a time of close family connections, this family was particularly close. Three of Betsey’s sisters were married to 3 Wallace brothers and the 4 women, with their husbands and children, lived on adjoining farms in Henniker, NH. Despite this, 3 of John and Betsey’s sons went off to NYS to seek their fortunes. William’s destination has been lost but Robert settled in Livonia and James in Pittstown.

James’ life has intrigued me for several reasons. He clearly found financial success and gave his children good values and educations, but left so little behind him for the researcher. He held no public office and except for land purchases and highway duty, his name is barely noted in the town records. Yet James came from a prominent family with descendants who also achieved recognition and esteem. He left a substantial estate, but I found no record of his death in the area newspapers or mention of either of his marriages. This could have been because the Irish, and also the Scots-Irish, were at that time the most despised of any ethnicity. In Pittstown, they were often treated with disdain and given the most menial of jobs, as evidenced in local historical ledgers.

Perhaps James followed a friend or family member to Pittstown, but I have found no support for this theory, nor have I found relatives who followed him. He was also of the right age to have fought in the War of 1812, but there is no record of his doing so. In 1815, he purchased land, from Joseph Phillips of Oxford, Chenango County. This farm property was in Grafton, according to the land records, but he may have never lived there. At the time of the 1820 U.S. Census, James lived in Pittstown with 2 other young persons, and was working in manufacturing. Since the growing and processing of flax was an important industry in both Henniker and Pittstown, it can be speculated that this was his work. A flax mill is located on the adjacent map just northwest of his farmstead.

James’ father, John, died in 1820, which may have helped James buy property. Later that year, he married Mary Begley (born in 1799), daughter of the late tobacconist Michael Begley of Albany and his widow Ann. After Michael’s death in 1805, Ann moved to Pittstown, living at the household of Thomas Lamson with her 3 children.

James and Mary started building their farm almost immediately. The first Pittstown property James purchased was a lot containing 50 acres, the south half of lot 76, due east of lot 77, which he bought 9 years later. This lot, located, in the Boyntonville area close to Hoosick, belonged to the estate of Lebbeus Lamson and his wife Margery, of the same family Ann Begley had lived with. Its previous owner had been Benjamin Smith, one of Michael Begley’s lawyers, who held the mortgage on the property. Although Ann Begley’s maiden name has never been discovered, it can be speculated that she was connected by blood to one of these two families.

A Dayton newspaper article refers to the Campbell farm as “a large farm” and “a fine place formerly owned by Governor Clinton of New York”. *Dayton Evening Herald, October 27, 1917, p.5* Governor Clinton did not own property in Pittstown, but there had been a Governor Colden. It is likely the writer meant Cadwallader R. Colden (1774-1839), a famous turf historian who kept racehorses and wrote about them, his pen name being “Old Turfman”. This Cadwallader R. Colden did own property in Pittstown, and was a taxpayer there as early as 1802.

“In the early days of the last century, Cadwalder (sic) Colden, whose grandfather was one of the last colonial governors under the crown, settled on a farm about two miles north of the village *Page 8*

[Boyntonville]. The house and barn were situated at the end of a short lane and are now gone due to fire. Mr. Colden owned race horses and laid out a track on the farm. In the 1930s, traces of it could still be seen". *Bornt, Harrington, Wiley, "Pittstown Through the Years", 1989: Pittstown Historical Society, pp. 25-6*

Another mention of the farm appears in the same book: "Another interesting section [of Sunkauissia Creek] called Hyde's Hole was a recreation spot for the young children and people of that era. It was a good place for swimming and wading and was located in back of the former Frank Campbell property." *Ibid, p. 68.* Frank Campbell, James' eldest daughter was the 3rd Campbell owner of that farm.

In 1831, James purchased another 230 acres, contiguous to the first parcel, and in 1836 another 62 acres, making the 4 adjoining properties nearly 350 acres, and including lots 76, 98, and the southern



half of lot 99 on the Pittstown Patent. According to James Jr.'s daughter, Annie Campbell, the farm consisted of 450 acres, but perhaps the numbers were confused. It was located up a road just past what became Warren Cemetery. Pieced together or not, the family all appeared to be proud of their farm, and thought of it as a homestead. I tried long and hard to find it, hoping it would be intact and of historic merit.

Detail of 1861 Rensselaer County map: Pittstown (on left) & Hoosick (on right)

Note J. W. Campbell in Pittstown and a Flax Mill in Hoosick

James, Sr. and his wife, Mary, had a total of 8 children: 3 boys and 5 girls. The Campbell children were "brought up with the simple standards of plain living and high thinking that were more prevalent then than now". *Conover, Charlotte R., Dayton Evening Herald, October 27, 1917, pg. 5.* It was a musical family; the eldest son played cornet in the village band and also studied flute and violin. Their parents came from a mixed religious background; Mary's father had been Catholic, while James' parents were strong Presbyterians, as were most Scots Irish.

The only religious connection for James, Sr. found in the Pittstown records was that of his involvement in the founding of a Universalist society; in 1839 James Campbell, John Spicer, Joseph Harrington, Benjamin Sheldon, and Joseph Wadsworth were chosen to be the first trustees of the First Universalist Society in Pittstown, which had been meeting in the Wadsworth School House. The trustees chosen were among those men who had "statedly (sic) attended divine services". *Sheldon and Wadsworth, September 23, 1839*

Mary Begley (Wife of James Campbell) and Her Origins:

Mary Begley's father, Michael Begley, first appeared in the American records in 1795 when he was naturalized in Albany, NY. He had to have lived in the U.S. and behaved well for at least 2 years and lived 1 year in NYS. At some point he married Ann, whose surname and origins are still unknown, although they seem to point to Pittstown. In 1797, he purchased from Frederick Mynderse a "house and store" on Court Street. They also owned other property: one of the pasture lots behind the First Church of Albany, bounty land in Ohio, and a parcel on an Indian reservation. Unlike James, Michael left quite a paper trail, most of it as unpaid bills and lawsuits. John Van Ness Yates, an opposing attorney on one of Michael's many court cases commented, "They were (between us) Irish suits, for some pitiful balances and to satisfy a little spite of Begley." *(continued on Page 10)*

(continued from Page 9) Michael's early life remains a bit of a mystery, although his prison record gives his birth as 1755 in Limerick, Ireland. He stood 5 feet 8 inches tall, with grey eyes and black hair. The capitol area had been a sleepy Dutch settlement before the revolution, but it saw a boom decade with the 1790s. Michael was one of many Irish immigrants, some of whom remained after fighting for the British, marrying Dutch women and Hollandising their names. I was unable to find a record of either British or American revolutionary service, although there was a record of bounty land in Ohio going to a Michael Begley. However, as there was an active after market in bounty lands, that in itself does not prove service. In Albany, Michael, a founding trustee of St. Mary's Church, fit in as a member of the Catholic merchant class. He kept a store selling groceries and enjoyed a thriving tobacco business, advertising in the local papers.

Michael and Ann had 3 children in the 1790s, but by 1800 they were living apart. Ann was listed as head of household in the 1800 U.S. Census, living in the Court Street house, while Michael lived nearby on Hudson Street. He had other problems as well. There were numerous lawsuits, culminating with his being convicted of assault and battery and sentenced to 2 years in Newgate Prison. Located in Greenwich Village, this was one of the worst prisons at that time. It was truly "being sent down the river", and sentences were harsh. (A fellow inmate, a merchant in Pittstown, was given a life sentence for forgery). After Michael was released from prison, his health was poor and he never fully recovered. He died in 1805.

Ann was made administratrix of Michael's intestate estate, but there was not enough money to pay all the debts. Even the funeral bill went unpaid for a few years and was eventually turned over to the district attorney. The Court Street property was seized, although somehow Ann managed to get it back, and it remained in the family until 1831. One of Michael's assets was a bible, valued at \$15. That might have held information as to Michael and Ann's origins, and would not have been seized by the court, but it has never been recovered. Michael was probably buried in a Catholic cemetery, but the St. Mary's records were destroyed in a fire, many of its graves were moved, and his gravesite is unknown. When his wife died in 1827, she was buried at Pittstown Corners Cemetery.

Ann's origins have remained a mystery. She was literate and had good handwriting; during the administration period she was smart enough to get as much as she could for herself and her children. I expect she was from a Yankee family for these reasons, and probably from Pittstown, as she moved there after Michael's death.

Ann was born in 1753 or 1756 (records vary), so the 3 children were born around the time of her 40th birthday, rather late to be starting a family. No previous children or husband have been found, and she is known only as Ann, or Nancy, wife of Michael Begley. Her burial at Pittstown Corners indicates that, although not a member of the Baptist Church, she did not share Michael's religion, which is unusual at a time when mixed marriages were uncommon.

Of Michael and Ann's children, Mary Begley lived the longest of the 3 siblings. Her brother Thomas S. may have been the Thomas S. Bigley born in Albany in 1794, who died in a Manhattan prison in 1827. *NYS Burial Records* Another Thomas Bigley, born in 1794, was hanged for murder outside Union College. There is no proof he was either of these Thomas Bigleys, but no others have yet been found. Mary's brother, Benjamin, who also changed his surname to Bigley, did better. He married Rhoda Robertston, daughter of a Pittstown doctor, and had several children. After Rhoda died, he married Lydia Paddock, and they had one son, John. However, Benjamin and 2 of his older children died in a Page 10

Received this Day,
AND FOR SALE, BY
MICHAEL BEGLEY,
COURT-STREET, ALBANY,
Opposite the Court-House ;
5 Hogheads SPIRITS ;
4 Pipes BRANDY ;
3 Do. GEN ;
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From his own knowledge in the
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faction to all those who honour him
with their custom.
July 2, 1798.

disastrous house fire in 1837. *Pittstown Historical Society Newsletter, Issue XIX, Spring, 2011, p.5* Benjamin's widow and the youngest son moved away, eventually to Wisconsin; son Benjamin S. moved in with the Gideon Reynolds family, and daughter Rhoda moved into James and Mary Campbell's household. Both Benjamin and Rhoda migrated to Michigan a few years later.

Note: Gideon Reynolds (1813-1853) was a successful businessman and politician, serving 2 terms in Congress. Both Benjamin S. and Rhoda worked in his household after their father's death.

The Eight Children of James Campbell and Mary Begley

James Campbell, Jr., the Campbell's eldest child (born 1822) seems to have been the golden boy in his family. As well as being musical, James was enough of a scholar to be sent to Bennington Academy, a fine high school in VT, where he must have been a boarding student. After that, he was one of several Pittstown boys who went to Troy to study at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. He took his B.S. in Chemistry, graduating in the class of 1843.

After graduation, James taught school for several years in nearby Hoosick and down the Hudson in Hyde Park. He then moved to Eaton, Ohio, to teach school, and then south to Dayton, a growing city, where he became one of its leading chemists.

His brother William H. (born 1833/4) followed James to Dayton, where they were both living in 1859. William may have fought in the Civil War, (if so he is the only Campbell that did) but after marrying he moved to Nebraska, he and his son establishing an award winning Jersey dairy farm. *Who's Who in Nebraska 1940*

Ann Minerva (born 1823) was the 2nd child. She married Charles Henry Spicer, the son of Allen and Lydia Spicer of Hoosick. Together they moved to Otisco, Michigan, probably following her Bigley cousins. Her sister, Mary Eliza, followed them, marrying and settling in Michigan.

Sarah Caroline (born 1825) married Perry Warren Richmond, son of Josiah Richmond and Phoebe Warren, a successful local family. (Perry's uncle, Hon. Perry Warren, was a friend and neighbor of James Campbell, and served as an administrator of his estate). Sarah and Perry settled on a 515 acre farm in Hoosick, where he served as postmaster for many years. Their children were: Josiah, Mary Agnes, Edward, Emily Geer, and Ruth Warren.

John W. Campbell (born 1827) remained on the family farm all his life, working with his father. He was civic-minded and served a term as Town Supervisor. An obituary in the Troy Northern Budget called him a man of strict honesty and integrity and the last surviving member of the Pittstown Fire Insurance Company. He and his wife, Emily A. Brown of Hoosick, had 6 children, most of whom moved away. They were: Eloise Frank, Roscoe Conklin, William James, Frederick, Martha, and Mary.

Harriet Jane (born 1831) married John Borden Sherman. They lived on the Sherman Farm (previously owned by Caleb Sherman), which is now under the Tomhannock Reservoir. Their children were Mary Ellen, James Campbell, and Wilbur Elisha. Harriet died in 1888. Descendants of Harriet and John still live in the Pittstown area.

Esther Maria, born in 1836, died just after her 1st birthday. She was buried at Pittstown Corners, probably near her grandmother, Ann Begley. Time has obscured the writing and location of both gravestones.

Mary died in 1841, well loved by her family and her community. She left behind a husband and 7 living children. It is poignant to think of the pain in her brief life: her parents' estrangement, losing her father and her home at age 6, losing both her brothers in tragic circumstances, and having her last baby die. However, both Troy newspapers published death notices, and 6 of her 7 children named one of their own daughters after her.

James married Thirza Boynton after Mary died. After he died in 1859, of a fit of apoplexy (a stroke), the children bought out Thirza's share of the property for \$700. Including household effects and farm equipment, the estate consisted of many mortgages and promissory notes owed to him. James is buried in Warren Cemetery, near his old farm, with one wife's grave on either side of his own. Son John and John's wife, Emily, are also buried there but the rest of the children are scattered far and wide.

Administration papers of James Campbell's estate elaborate on the story of a large and comfortable farm: hay in the fields and corn in the bins. There were 4 large barns, a long shed and a cider house. In addition to hay, the farm grew rye, oats, wheat, corn, potatoes, and *(continued on 12)* Page 11

(continued from Page 11) apples. Livestock included some 200 sheep, and several milk cows and horses. Animals did the work on this farm: a yoke of oxen, a yoke of stags, and a yoke of steers. A dozen beef cattle were enumerated. Although no pigs were listed except “one swine for the widow”, a barrel of pork and “150 pounds for the widow” attest to their former presence. For getting around, the Campbells kept 4 waggons (sic) and 4 sleighs of various descriptions. Many things were marked “old”, probably to keep their value down in the assessment.

Most interesting perhaps, was the choice of administrators: John W. Campbell, who already co-owned much of the farm property; Perry Warren, a neighbor and the uncle of son-in-law Perry Warren Richmond; and Lebbeus Lamson, from whom James and Mary bought the initial acreage of their farm. Also of interest are the friends, relatives and neighbors for whom James carried mortgages and promissory notes. These included: Lorenzo Herrington and Philip Slade (both shown on the map) as well as Joseph C. Brenenstuhl and wife, David Norton and wife, and Samuel A. Hyde.

After James, Sr.’s death, John W. bought out his brothers’ and sisters’ shares of the property and continued to operate the farm. When John himself died in 1904 (struck by a falling barn door), the homestead passed to his daughter, Frank. She had married John H. Brenenstuhl and moved to Troy where they operated a livery stable, but they returned to Pittstown to run the farm, which they passed down to their son, Ernest. That family proved childless, and the farm was eventually sold in the 1930s to their Potter Hill neighbor Elmer Humiston; after some renovation his daughter, Helen, and her husband Charles Sheffer moved into it in 1934.

Their tenure on the Campbell homestead was sadly short-lived, as the farmhouse burned to the ground in another disastrous fire in November of 1935, killing two of the Sheffers’ children, and burning Helen badly. Charles and his eldest son, Wally, were out in the barn milking when the kitchen stove exploded. The house was never rebuilt, but the farm passed down to Wally (whose son Eric now operates Sheffer’s Grassland Dairy Farm). No photos have yet been found of the old house, although the local papers referred to it as a “century-old one and one-half story farmhouse”. The 15 foot chimney in the newspaper clipping, all that survived, looked impressive. Perhaps the remains of a horse track can still be seen on the property, but my dream of an intact historic farm is gone.

Note: In related articles, Neysa Garrett wrote “Pittstown Boys Who Studied at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute”, Pittstown Historical Society Newsletter, Issue XXIV, Fall, 2012 pp. 9-12, and Lyle Denny wrote about the Bigley/Bagleys “A Monument to My Pittstown Connection”, Pittstown Historical Society Newsletter Issue XIX, Spring, 2011 pp. 5-6

FOR SALE (Published in the Albany Gazette, September 7, 1795)

That very valuable Farm lying in the town of Pittstown, pleasantly situated along the Bank of Hoosick river about 25 miles from Albany, 15 from Lansingburgh and 7 east of Schaghticoke – containing upwards of 400 acres – 60 or 70 are of first quality of low or interval land, fit for plow or meadow, and 350 of upland of a good kind, warm soil, fit for grass or grain, and very free of stone – The low land, and about 250 acres of the upland is under good improvement, the residue is well timbered, with white-pine, oak, beach, ash, bass and maple – There is on the premises, one new English barn, 60 feet by 40, with a horse stable under one end, one cow house, 75 feet long; one wagon house, and corn grainery 42 feet by 21, four framed dwelling houses, and pot-ash works, all in excellent order. ALSO the one half of a grist-mill, standing on the said premises, calculated either for country or merchant work. There is now in it three run of stones, with bolts and apparatus necessary for manufacturing of flour, and convenience for another run of stones if required. ALSO one half of a new Dutch and English saw-mill that cutts about 4000 logs per year – It is a delightful situation, in the heart of a well settled country, and a commodious stand either for store or tavern– The main road that leads from Washington County to the New City passes along this farm – For further particulars apply to the subscriber at the Patroon’s mills, in *Page 12*



Water-vliet, where they may see a map of the premisses, with all the public roads, highways and towns that lay adjacent thereto – considerable abatement will be made if the whole of the purchase money is paid down, and possession will be given immediately. THOMAS L. WITBEEK; August, 2d 1795. N.B. Eight good farm horses; three yoke of oxen; eight milch cows; thirty sheep; two breeding mares, three quarters blooded; one breeding mare seven eighths blooded; one beautiful stallion fifteen [?]teenths blooded, and all the necessary farming utensils, will be sold with the above premises. (Note: The location of this farm is not known.)

Dunham Farm Recollections (Part V)

Note from the editor: This is our 5th installment of excerpts from Steve Dunham's "Recollections" of his life on his family farm on Ford Road in Pittstown. In his "Recollections", Dunham offers insights into farm life in the mid-1900s. Dunham, who now lives in Florida, has continued to write additional chapters of his "Recollections" (22 chapters from 2017 to the present). The excerpts below are taken from Chapter 6.

Fishing in the Lake [the Tomhannock Reservoir]

Since my last writings the name of the Tomhannock Reservoir's resident watchman came to me. His name was Barney Weist. He'd been the watchman for many years. The city provided him with a small house to live in at no charge. It was a house very close to the lake that the city had bought up along with the land before the lake was created. The house could be seen from our farm.

The NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation [En-Con] used to net lots of fish from the lake. They had a few large nets set up in the lake in back of our farm. They'd anchor the nets to trees along the shoreline. I guess the reason they put up their nets there was because few people fished or visited the lake there being a long distance from a road. If the nets were set up where the roads were close to the water, probably their netted fish would be taken. If I was at the lake when they came around to empty the nets, they'd give me a burlap bag or 2 of fish. Incredible the large amount of fish in the nets. Most every species that was in the lake. Lots of yellow perch, especially. Also bass, pickerel, panfish, etc. they netted the fish to restock lakes & ponds. I put the fish they gave me in our pond. Plus we ate some also. The Tomhannock is a jewel of a place to fish. Its been under-fished during its lifetime. Even with it being opened to public fishing in 1970, there wasn't a huge increase in the number of people who fished its serene waters. In the earlier years of the fishing permit system, the permits were free and they had no expiration. But eventually the permits had to be renewed once a year and also they were not free any more. That started in the early 1980s, if I'm correct. To obtain a permit one had to have 2 small photos taken of themselves. One to affix on the permit. The other the City kept for its records. I don't recall a special permit being required to ice fish. Maybe so, now, After the lake opened up under the control of En-Con, only specified sections of the lake were open to ice fishing. The area with the highest number of people ice fishing was the lake area in the area of Colarusso Island.

Once En-Con took over the lake and made strict regulations with strict enforcement, people couldn't get away with doing a lot of what they previously did. Previously Barney would drive around the lake in his old pickup truck before En-Con took over. He'd inform people if it was illegal to fish at the lake. But, it was just a mild warning with no enforcement. He didn't patrol all that often. I think he generally left a lot of people alone instead of warning them. Back then game wardens sometimes did a bit of patrolling of the lake. But just to see if they had a fishing license not to arrest them for illegal fishing. So it was pretty much a free for all at the lake until En-Con took over. People would swim and occasionally ride around in row boats and motor boats. And most all got away with it. Many would stand in the water as they fished trying to get further out to deeper waters and more fish to catch. No more wading in the water when fishing after the take-over. Plus they raised the minimum length of bass & pickerel that was kept. Maybe it's the other way around? The shoreline in back of our farm had few spots one could fish due to heavy vegetation and trees. Difficult to cast the line without snagging the hook or lure onto branches.

I used to wear hip boots at the lake to stand in the water before En-Con took over. I quit doing so a few years before En-Con. Reason was I saw a very strange looking (continued on Page 14) Page 13

(continued from Page 13) snake in the lake. Brown color, very slender, about 5 ft. long. It was close to the shore. I was on dry ground. It was motionless staring at me for the longest time. I had no idea what species it was. Not a regular water snake as they are lots thicker and have a design. It looked like a sea snake to me. And most sea snakes are highly venomous. Evidently it had no fear of me. So no more wading in the water. Another time I once saw what appeared to be a venomous water moccasin at the lake. Very thick dark body. It had been on top of a bush overhanging the water. As I got closer, not realizing it was there, it got off the bush and made a big splashing noise when it landed in the shallow water at the shoreline edge – the lake was full.

A few times while fishing I caught other live things on the hooks besides fish. Caught a snake one time on the hook that had a lively earthworm as bait. Soon as I realized it was a snake caught on the hook as I was reeling, I cut the line. What a strange thing to have happen. Another time I caught a turtle on the hook. Felt like I was reeling in a rock until I saw just what it was. Turtles like earthworms as food so that makes sense they'd go after a worm on a fish hook. Again, I cut the fishing line not wanting to bother with that turtle. Not just snappers bite people.

The lake had lots of carp fish. Some were huge. The record size one was 46 pounds. That was the state record for a while, maybe still is. When those huge carp "leaped" out of the water, then back in – sounded so loud, like it was a whale. They were very difficult to catch with a rod & reel. They seemed not interested in lures or earthworms & the other types of bait. It's said they do go for kernels of corn on a regular fish hook. I tried that but no luck. A 46 pounder must be huge. They usually stayed in the mud bottom areas of the lake, such as coves where creeks flowed into the lake. Lots of soil sediment entered the lake from the creeks. And most creeks entered in the cove areas. Hence lake coves had mud bottoms instead of rock or gravel. Bullheads also go for mud bottom areas of lakes. I never liked to catch a bullhead as they have sharp "whiskers" on their heads that can inflict a nasty wound if one handles them to remove a hook. There were also sucker fish in the muddy bottom areas of the lake. Related to bullheads & carp. I recall about 57 years ago going sucker fishing in the early spring in a creek that flows threw Tomhannock Village, very close to the houses on the right hand side of the road heading towards the lake. Myself and a few friends whose aunt – Grace Brock – lived in a house along the creek where we caught suckers. We used homemade rods made out of rounded off 2 X 4s and about 6 ft. of heavy duty fish line with treble hooks. Didn't need any bait. The fish were snagged by the hooks as they went downstream. There were a huge number of suckers in that small creek. Wasn't too wide at all, maybe 5 ft. tops. But it was overflowing with melting snow water. It ended up in the lake.



Winter view of the Tomhannock Reservoir from the Dunham Farm on Ford Road, 1971 Page 14

Pittstown Historical Society News

PHS Collection Committee Seeking Donations:

When cleaning out your attics or organizing your files, if you find documents, artifacts or photos relating to Pittstown that you think may be of historic value, please consider sharing them with us (no matter how large or small). We can scan or photograph them and return them to you, or we can house them in our collection room, if you wish to donate the objects to us.



We recently received numerous historic items from the Sherman Farm LLC, among them a collection of canning jars from different periods. Thank you Sherman Farm LLC!

Contact our collection committee by email: pittstownhs@gmail.com or call Connie at: 518-686-7514

Please visit our exhibit of the Churches of Pittstown on view at the Pittstown Town Hall

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