



WASHINGTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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WINTER 2023 NEWSLETTER

Volume XXXIII #4

A New Project

The Washington County Historical Society has published many books as part of our mission. Several members of the organization are working on final edits to republish one of those books, titled "History of Washington County New York—Some Chapters in the History of the Town of Easton, NY". This book was originally published in 1959, and we are expecting the new publication will be available soon.

We are sharing an excerpt from the book below. Watch for information on our website, Facebook page and local papers for updates on when the book will be available for sale.

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

The Underground Railroad was the name given to the loosely organized movement to assist fugitive slaves to a place of safety. The fugitives were forwarded by night ten to twenty miles from house to house where they were kept concealed by day. Pursuit by U.S. marshals made secrecy essential so the agents of the movement seldom knew more than one or two agents behind and one or two ahead.

One of the stations in Easton was located in the northern part of the town at the home of Job and Esther Wilbur, now (1959) owned by Lester Peregrin, and through the co-operation of this family many a fleeing slave from the south was sheltered here and carried on to the next station in Greenwich on their flight to Canada and freedom.

Sometime in the early 50's one of these fleeing slaves arrived at the Wilbur homestead hotly pursued by a couple of slave hunters. He was in the house but a short time when they heard the pursuers coming down the lane from the main road. The poor fugitive was hustled up into the garret by means of a ladder and trap door. On the way through the dining room, the slave saw on the table a long carving knife, which he grabbed as he went along. His hosts, being Friends and in favor of non-violence, objected; but the colored man insisted that he was not going to be taken alive and took the carving knife along with him.

By this time the two men had arrived at the house, and coming in demanded to know where the slave was. Of course Job and Esther gave them no information; but by the authority of the Fugitive Slave Act, they went ahead and searched the house.

Not finding him, but seeing the ladder leading up to the garret, one of the men climbed up it and stuck his head through the trap door. There stood the slave, knife in hand, threatening to use it if the man came any farther. After parleying awhile and seeing the slave was desperately in earnest, he came down and the two went away to secure more help to take the negro.

As soon as they were gone and out of sight, Job hitched a horse to the carriage, while Esther dressed the slave in her clothes, including a thick veil inside her Quaker bonnet. Soon the slave was on his way to Union Village to the home of Dr. Hiram Corliss, the next station of the Underground Railroad.

At another time, later in the struggle, a slave arrived at this home in a great state of exhaustion, having contracted a severe cold from exposure during his flight from his pursuers. This developed into an attack of pneumonia. His pursuers had evidently lost his trail, for they never came after him. He remained at the Wilbur home where he was taken care of for one or two years until he died. He had with him a strong cane with the head of deer horn with two deadly prongs. He said he had used it twice on his flight to kill blood hounds which had been sent to track him down. This cane is now in the possession of Oren B. Wilbur, a grandson of Job and Esther Wilbur.

His name was Frank. When someone suggested he ought to have a last name, he said he would call himself Frank Quaintance. Asked why the name, he replied, "It was through the quaintance of this good Wilbur family that I am still alive and comfortable."

Washington County Historical Society Mission Statement

*The Washington County
Historical Society is an
educational organization
dedicated to engaging diverse
audiences in the study and
application of the collective
heritage of Washington County,
New York, and its environs.*

- Rev. October 2005

WCHS has a constantly growing
collection of information,
original documents, and other
items of interest about
Washington County and its
inhabitants, past and present.

If you would like to find out more
about volunteering to help with the
Heritage Research Library or other
opportunities, please contact the
Historical Society and let us know
what interests you!

Heritage Research Library



Jennifer LaRock

The library is open for visitors!
Inquiries can also be emailed to
library@wchs-ny.org
or by phone.

Normal hours:
Wednesdays, 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Fridays, 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

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Visit us on Facebook
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Greetings From Your President

To WCHS Members,

I would like to extend my best wishes to you and your family for a Happy and Healthy Holiday Season and New Year. This is a very busy time of the year for us all and hopefully you can take a moment, have a cup of tea, coffee, or your favorite beverage, and enjoy both this Newsletter and the 2023 Journal. It's a great time of year to take a minute and reflect on the past year and new year ahead.

If you need a last-minute gift idea or want a good book to read, be sure to stop into our bookshop at the Wing-Northup House at 167 Broadway, Fort Edward during our open hours on Wednesdays and Fridays, 9:30 a.m.- 4:30 p.m. or go online to wchs-ny.org to see the many books we offer.

This is my last Presidents letter, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has made my last four years as President of the Washington County Historical Society a pleasant and rewarding experience. I know the Society will be in good hands with incoming President Patrick Niles and Vice President Susan Lynch, along with our outstanding board of trustees and Executive Director Jen LaRock.

A special thank you to Kay Tomasi and Keith Truesdale, two long-term board members who are stepping down from their roles on the board this coming year. They cannot be thanked enough for their time, energy, passion, and knowledge they have given the Washington County Historical Society over the years. They both have served as past presidents, as well as trustees and committee chairpersons. I am hopeful that they both will continue to be involved in the future.

Nat Huntington
WCHS President

We Value Our Members!

We are always welcoming new members to the Historical Society! With your membership support, you have the satisfaction of knowing you are participating in the preservation of the important historical heritage of Washington County, New York.

Member Benefits Include:

- ✓ Mail or online access to our quarterly Newsletter
- ✓ A copy of our latest WCHS Annual Journal
- ✓ A 10% discount on purchases at the Wing-Northup House Bookstore

WCHS membership runs **January 1-December 31**. New memberships received after October 1 will be honored for the following year. Annual memberships and donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. Visit online: <http://wchs-ny.org/membership.php> or you can complete the form from the mailing page of this newsletter and return it to the Historical Society.

Historic Markers Unveiled

Two historic markers were unveiled recently, made possible by the Washington County Historical Society and the William G. Pomeroy Foundation. Both events were well-attended by community members, historical re-enactors, local politicians and members of area historic organizations.

The first event was held on October 7, 2023 in Riverside Park in Whitehall, NY. The marker signified that Whitehall was used for prisoner exchanges between the British and Americans. Those prisoner exchanges were further used as cover for negotiation between the British and Vermont.



The second event was held on October 8, 2023 in the Lake George Battlefield Park. The marker notes British Major Christopher Carleton's destruction of Fort George and a raid that shaped our landscape. In addition to the Washington County Historical Society and Pomeroy Foundation, the marker and event were also made possible by the Lake George Battlefield Alliance.



WCHS 83rd Annual Membership Meeting

The WCHS 83rd annual membership meeting was held on October 28, 2023 at the Sandy Hill Arts Center in Hudson Falls, NY. WCHS Board of Trustees held their regular monthly meeting before the start of the membership meeting and award presentations. The 2024 incoming slate of nominations and the 2024 WCHS budget were approved by members and various committee chairs provided year-end report updates.

President Nat Huntington then announced this year's WCHS President's award recipient — Sarah Hall. Sarah was recognized for her hard work and dedication to the Washington County Historical Society as a committee member and volunteer. Also, her work on the Revolutionary War Soldier Project and with Historic Markers is greatly appreciated.

Pat Niles then introduced Bill Nikas, who shared details and stories about the restoration journey of the Sandy Hill Arts Center from the start of the project to its current use. Pat also expressed the Society's thanks for hosting our group in the top floor meeting space in the building. The Sandy Hill Arts Center was a recipient of a Washington County Historical Society Historic Preservation Award in 2022.

Paul McCarty then announced this year's **James R. Cronkhite Award** recipients: Dale and Joan Prouty. The Proutys have been heavily involved in many county-wide educational and historical programs and have done research about one-room schoolhouses in Washington County. The Cronkhite Award is presented each year by the Washington County Historical Society to recognize outstanding dedication in promoting and preserving the historical heritage of Washington County, NY. Paul acknowledged thanks to Sally Brillon and Pat Niles, who serve with him on the award committee.

Following the Cronkhite Award, Pat Niles and Susan Lynch, Co-Chairs for the Washington County Historical Society Historic Preservation Committee, began the introductions for this year's preservation award recipients:

Interior/Exterior Award: Presented to Jeffrey and Marcia Podolec for their commendable work in historic preservation renovating a former Agway building in Cambridge. They shared their experiences and work done on their restoration project.

Community Service Award: Presented to Sally Brillon for her many contributions to the history of Washington County as an author and educator. Paul McCarty shared many of Sally's achievements and her role in promoting and celebrating our local history.

Community Service Award: Presented to R. Paul McCarty for his achievements and role with many aspects of history of Washington County. Paul's wife, Kathy, spoke of many of Paul's accomplishments, including serving as historian for the Town of Fort Edward, local educator, and Executive Director of the Fort Edward Historical Association/The Old Fort House Museum. Pat Niles presented the award to Paul.



Award recipients (left-right): Sally Brillon, Jeffrey Podolec, Marcia Podolec, R. Paul McCarty, Joan Prouty and Dale Prouty

Susan Lynch gave closing remarks and thanked the Sandy Hill Arts Center, Sheldon Slate and other Washington County Historical Society Historic Preservation Committee members: Nat Huntington, Pat Niles, Dale Prouty, Keith Truesdale, Steve Lapham, Bill Krattinger, John Mead, Jim Arndt, and Cristiana Pena. Anyone interested in joining the committee may contact the Historical Society for more information. The meeting concluded at 1:30 p.m.

Congratulations to our award recipients. We know there are many projects going on in Washington County; please let us know about them. If you'd like to be considered for next year's awards, visit the WCHS website for guidelines and application details.



President's Award recipient Sarah Hall with Nat Huntington.



Cronkhite Award recipients Dale and Joan Prouty accepting their award from Paul McCarty.



Preservation Award recipients Jeffrey and Marcia Podolec, with Susan Lynch and Pat Niles.



Community Service Award recipient Sally Brillon with Pat Niles and Paul McCarty.



Community Service Award recipient Paul McCarty with Pat Niles and Kathy McCarty.



The renovated top floor in the Sandy Hill Arts Center.

Photos courtesy Jen LaRock and Kelly Mead.

Old Gil Harris – Kingsbury Tory

Old Gil Harris made quite a name for himself in Washington County. He didn't bring his reputation with him. He made it here.

Gilbert Harris was reportedly born to Daniel and Abigail Harris on June 7, 1735 according to the Wallingford, CT Vital Records. His marriage to Thankful Townsend on July 28, 1757 was reported in the Cornwall, CT Vital Records.

Along with his brother Moses Harris, Sr., Gilbert served in the French & Indian War, entitling him to a land bounty in Bradshaw's Patent in Washington County. Thus he arrived in northern Kingsbury in 1768 and became the owner of one square mile of fertile farmland near the corner of Tripoli Road and Vaughn Road. The property came to be known as the Thousand Apple Tree Farm. His local fame came not from apple trees.

Here is an excerpt from Holden's 1874 *History of Queensbury*. As the pioneers were settling on Bradshaw's Patent, Moses Harris Sr. was arrested by the British while at the house of his brother Gilbert in Kingsbury. Gilbert, "well knowing that Moses was fully cognizant of his evil doings, insisted that Moses be taken into Canada as a prisoner, even if he died on the route, he being not only advanced in years, but in feeble health at the time. Andrew Blakely, who was in charge or command of the party of Tories, resolutely opposed the proposition, saying 'he is an old man, and if he goes, the fatigue and exposure will kill him.' To this Gilbert unfeelingly responded, 'Let him die then.'"

Holden further reports: Gil Harris "was a bitter, uncompromising Loyalist and ... he was one of the most efficient and energetic of the secret agents employed by the British authorities for obtaining and transmitting intelligence through the American lines to the officers commanding the royal armies both north and south." Holden tells us how Gilbert's nephew Moses Harris Jr., with whom Gilbert had hunted and fished when Moses was a boy, was able to gain his uncle's confidence in such a way as to obtain the messages being conveyed by the British. Young Moses agreed to be a carrier, but had the papers transferred to General Philip Schuyler who copied them and returned them to Moses, to be carried to British officers. Each time Moses was captured while carrying messages from his Uncle Gil, he was able to talk his way out of imprisonment. It is said that after Burgoyne's surrender, General Schuyler rewarded Moses with a purse of 100 guineas for his services.

Johnson's 1878 *History of Washington County* reports that Kingsbury "was known as the headquarters of a nest of Tories of the most desperate and malignant type ... hesitating at no crime and wholly disregarding the ties of neighborhood ... Probably the one who was most feared and execrated was Gilbert or 'Old Gil' Harris."

A footnote in Johnson's book adds these words: A youth named Graham, coming up the road towards Sandy Hill, passed near this party, one of whom fired on and wounded him. Another called out, "Why that's little Oliver Graham; don't kill him." "Yes damn 'em, kill 'em all!" growled Harris. Graham, however, ... escaped with his life.

Gilbert's will, probated in Washington County, shows that he left nothing to his family and everything to his friend and executor, Stephen Allen. His family, it is said, wanted nothing to do with him. Supposedly he moved to Bolton, NY, died in 1808, and is buried in an unmarked grave near Basin Bay in Lake George.

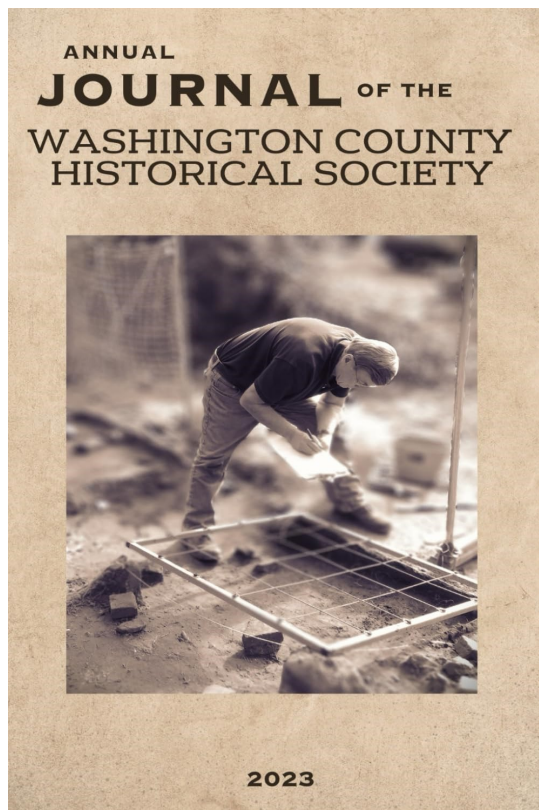
But his legacy was not all bad. His eldest son Jonathan had a son Townsend (named for his grandmother, Thankful Townsend) born in Sandy Hill. Townsend Harris had several very notable achievements. He was appointed by President Pierce to be the first US Consul to Japan. He opened up trade between the US and Japan. He started the first free college for poor students in the US: the City College of NY. And he was active in organizations for the prevention of cruelty to animals. Perhaps he inherited only a small number of his grandfather's genes.

- Submitted by Connie Harris Farrington

2023 WCHS Journal Publication

The 2023 edition of the Journal brings the reader the first part of scholarly thesis on the re-making of the pre-Civil War American political party system through the lens of the political evolution of a prominent resident of Washington County, Henry Bliss Northup. It also includes an interesting investigation into the careers of two prominent nineteenth century men who shared the same name, one a county resident and journalist who filed some of the first reports from the battlefield at Gettysburg.

It concludes with a heartfelt tribute to the life and contributions of noted archaeologist David Starbuck to Washington County's colonial military history in Fort Edward (picture below shows the front cover of this edition).



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The Committee would like to thank contributors Will Case, Kenneth Perry, and Matthew Rozell, and we look forward to receiving future submissions from our membership and others.

The Washington County Historical Society has been publishing these historical journals for several years and they are sent to our members as a membership benefit. They are also for sale on our shop website, along with past Journal editions. We offer many local historical books and items for sale — visit our site for great holiday gift ideas!



WASHINGTON COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY EST. 1940

167 Broadway, Fort Edward NY 12828-1709

Telephone (518) 747-9108

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Winter 2023 Newsletter

Full Name (please print)

☐ NEW MEMBER

☐ RENEWAL

Address

City/State

Zip

E-Mail

Phone No.

Please note WCHS membership year runs January 1st thru December 31. New memberships received after October 1st will be honored for the following year. Annual memberships and donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

Membership Categories:

☐ Benefactor \$500

☐ Sustaining \$150

☐ Contributing \$75

☐ Patron \$50

☐ Individual/Family \$35

☐ Senior/Senior Couple/Student \$25

*Sign Up Online
at www.wchs-ny.org*

I would like to include an additional gift of \$ _____

☐ Check Enclosed (Payable to: Washington County Historical Society)

OR

Name on Credit Card

Card Number

Exp. Date

CSV Code

Questions (please answer) :

1. I would like to receive my newsletter by email

☐ Yes ☐ No

2. I would like to be contacted about volunteering

☐ Yes ☐ No

mail completed form to: Washington County Historical Society, 167 Broadway, Fort Edward, NY 12828 Question? info@wchs-ny.org or 518-747-9108