



WASHINGTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

EST.
1940

SPRING 2024 NEWSLETTER

Volume XXXIV #1

May is Preservation Month!

Preservation Month was established in 1973 and is co-sponsored by local preservation groups, state historical societies, and business and civic organizations across the country. During the month of May, events are planned to promote historic places for the purpose of instilling national and community pride, promoting heritage tourism, and showing the social and economic benefits of historic preservation.

WCHS has an active Preservation Committee, recognizing local county projects each year with our Historic Preservation Awards (applications to submit projects for consideration can be found on our website). The committee also works to bring programs and lectures to the public. We are celebrating historic preservation in Washington County by offering two special events in May:

Preservation in Progress: Salem

May 10, 1:00-4:00 p.m. in Salem, NY



Exterior view of the Salem Courthouse

Ever wonder what goes into maintaining and restoring historic buildings? On this guided three-hour tour, we'll visit the Salem Courthouse, New Collar Goods (a former shirt factory), and the Salem Episcopal Church to learn about the challenges, goals, and funding involved in undertaking a restoration. We'll also take a first-hand look at the building elements and discuss best practices for repair. The tour will be led by WCHS Vice President and architectural historian Susan Lynch in conjunction with representatives from each site.

Fee is \$20 per person. Registration and prepayment are required as space is limited. Please register on the WCHS website or call the office at 518-747-9108 for more information.

Anatomy of Buildings: Architectural Vocabulary and Identifying 19th Century Styles

May 16, 6:00 p.m. at WCHS—Wing-Northup House, 167 Broadway, Fort Edward, NY

This one-hour program presented by Susan Lynch will offer a brief overview of common language used to describe buildings and an introduction to architectural styles found in Washington County. Familiarity with stylistic elements and influences helps provide historic context to the built environment and a better understanding of your community.

Susan Lynch is an architectural historian with experience completing historic resources surveys, National Register nominations, preservation planning, and educational programming. She has worked in non-profit, private, and public sectors, collaborating with State Historic Preservation Offices in New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut as well as many regional organizations. Susan holds a BA in Architectural Studies from Hobart and William Smith Colleges and an MS in Historic Preservation from the University of Vermont.

See page 4 for additional WCHS Calendar of Events >>>

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.

Newsletter Editor:
Kelly Mead

How To Contact Us:



Phone: (518) 747-9108



Address: 167 Broadway,
Fort Edward, NY 12828



Web: www.wchs-ny.org

E-mail addresses:
info@wchs-ny.org

Visit us on Facebook
and Instagram!

WCHS President's Letter

Did history really happen in Washington County?

At a recent program on America's 250th Anniversary, conducted by Al Cormier, Salem Deputy Historian, he related a story of when he first arrived in Salem many years ago and was asked if history really occurred in Salem. As I look back, maybe this question isn't as surprising as it first seems. Toward the end of my teaching career, there was an emphasis on national history with a loss of local history from school curricula. The 250th Anniversary of the birth of the United States is an opportunity to teach, learn, excite, and experience history for both students and adults in many different ways.

America250 is an organization trying to spearhead a nationwide commemoration of the birth of the United States. It seeks to encourage a celebration of the diverse and fascinating story of the evolution of America's history. Washington County has assembled its own committee—the "Washington County 250th: Celebrate America's History In Your Backyard." Washington County's committee seeks the same exact goals with a focus on local and county history.

Washington County was founded in 1772 as Charlotte County (Queen Charlotte was the Queen of England at that time). The county name was changed in 1784 to Washington County. There are a number of Washington Counties around the United States, as many believed that George Washington was the heart and soul of the American Revolution.

When Charlotte County's government was forming, the Revolutionary War was in its early stages. The county did not even have a county militia, still relying on the Albany County militia. All aspects of the war hit hard in Charlotte County. In 1775, the county saw some of the early military action during the war with the taking of Fort Ticonderoga and Skenesborough (Whitehall). The British threatened then Charlotte County in 1776, and the Patriots responded by building the first United States Navy in Skenesborough, and the use of it with the Battle of Valcour Island. When the British retreated at the end of October 1776, a feeling of relief came to the county. Then, in 1777, the British not only threatened the county but invaded it. The famous Battles of Saratoga were fought but a few miles from Charlotte County. The British Army stayed in then Charlotte County (which extended from the northern boundary of Albany County to the Canadian border) from July through September of 1777. The British Army actually spent more time in Charlotte County than it did in Saratoga County (then Albany County). Charlotte County played an important role in Burgoyne's Campaign and was a major factor in the British defeat.

The British Commander, John Burgoyne, decided to build a road from Whitehall to Fort Edward, just 23 miles. Unfortunately, Burgoyne didn't realize how difficult it would be to build a road through virgin forest, swamps, and build bridges across streams. Oh, by the way, with the Patriot Army cutting trees, diverting streams and destroying parts of already-built road, it took the British more than 40 days to reach Fort Miller, where the British would eventually cross the Hudson River.

One of the major victories in the 1777 Campaign was the defeat of a British and German contingent that set out from Fort Miller and traveled through the towns of Easton, Greenwich, White Creek and Cambridge. The Cambridge militia actually attacked and defeated the British/German 1,000-man unit on their way to Walloomsac (the site of the Battle of Bennington, located in Hoosick Falls, Rensselaer County). The British Army lost close to 1,000 men from Burgoyne's once 10,000-man army. That defeat was even more costly in time, which the British were running out of due to the oncoming fall and winter.

Why did it take another five weeks to stockpile supplies needed to reach Albany? The Hudson River had a number of portages. The British had to portage supplies from Lake Champlain to Lake George. Once the supplies were shipped to the southern end of Lake George (Fort George), they then traveled by wagon to Fort Edward where they were portaged again. Once the supplies arrived at Fort Miller, those supplies were portaged again around the falls at Fort Miller.

For every day of supplies needed, it took two days to stockpile those supplies. Once the British crossed the Hudson into Saratoga (Schuylerville today), British communications and supply lines were cut. The British spent five more weeks gathering supplies to reach their objective in Albany. Those five weeks were spent in Charlotte County. The more than 70 days spent in Charlotte County allowed the American Commanders Philip Schuyler and Horatio Gates time to gather an army of 8,000 men, which was the army that defeated the British at the Battles of Saratoga. Those 70-plus days spent in Charlotte County wore down the British Army through the difficulties of building a road, constantly being under fire by the American Army, and the portage of supplies. The American victory at Saratoga is considered the "Turning Point of the American Revolution."

Well, did history really happen in Washington County?

The story of the Burgoyne Campaign is just one event that helped shape the United States. Today, I wonder how many Washington County citizens, school children, or visitors going through Washington County know of that critical moment of our history. Washington County's history is fascinating—we were a forerunner in the areas of military, industrial, agricultural, governmental, societal and constitutional development of the United States. Over the next few years, the Washington County 250th, in cooperation with its seventeen towns, historical and community organizations, will try to present the story of Washington County. The Washington County Historical Society is taking a leading role on the Washington County 250th Committee, with four current board members serving on the 250th Committee. If you have the time, consider joining the Washington County Historical Society and/or the Washington County 250th to help celebrate and educate our citizens in the rich history of Washington County and its part in development of the United States.

Pat Niles
WCHS President

WCHS Republishes Popular Local History Book

The Washington County Historical Society has now republished a long out-of-print and popular book, "A History of Easton, N.Y.," co-authored by the members of the Easton Book Club.

The value of this text is undeniable to those with connections to the town of Easton and the whole of Washington County. In the late 1940's, the Easton Book Club initiated a project to document the complete history of the town of Easton. Both members of the book club and interested people of the community contributed notes on family genealogies, organizations, oral histories and other notes of interest to the lengthy project. The final result of this dedication was the original manuscript, *Some Chapters in the History of the Town of Easton, N.Y.*, published by the Washington County Historical Society in 1959.



The newly reprinted version is 176 pages, indexed. It is available to purchase for \$22.95 from our bookshop in person or online (visit <https://wchs-ny.org/shop/> and click on the "Books" section).

WCHS Calendar Of Events

WCHS is planning several interesting presentations this year, please join us! The events listed below are free and open to the public (donations accepted). Watch for updates and other future programs in the Society's newsletter and local media outlets and papers. Any questions, please contact the Society at (518) 747-9108.

July 27, 2024 / 2:00 p.m. / 19th Century Postal System in Washington County

Presented by Stephen Matte

Location: The Slate Valley Museum, 17 Water Street, Granville, NY

August 7, 2024 / 6:30 p.m. / Lime Kilns of Bald Mountain (Greenwich/Easton Area)

Presented by Sandy McReynolds, K C Scott and Ken Perry

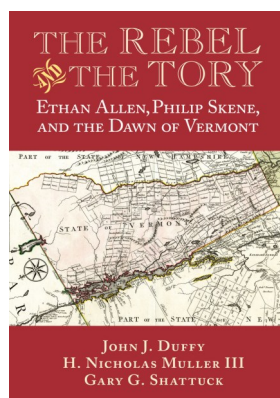
Location: Fort Miller Reformed Church, 1239 Fort Miller Road, Fort Edward, NY

October 10, 2024 / 5:30 p.m. / Patriots of Washington County Lecture (#1 of a Series)

Presented by Sarah Hall

Location: To Be Announced (watch for updates!)

Author Program March 28: Gary Shattuck To Speak About Philip Skene



The Washington County 250th Committee has invited Vermont author and historian Gary Shattuck to speak about the former British Army Major Philip Skene, the founder of Whitehall (Skenesborough). The program, entitled "Skenesborough, 1759 – 1775: The Rise and Decline of a British Officer's Dream," will be held on March 28 at 6:30 p.m. at the Sandy Hill Arts Center, 214 Main St. in Hudson Falls and is sponsored by the Washington County 250th Committee and the Sandy Hill Arts Center.

Gary Shattuck will describe how Skene came to the Lake Champlain area with Generals Abercrombie and Amherst in 1758 to capture Forts Ticonderoga and Crown Point. After the capture of Crown Point, Skene was left in command of the fort and saw the opportunities for land development.

In 1759, Skene was granted a large land grant which eventually grew to 60,000 acres. Skene sold his military commission in 1769 and put all his efforts into the development of Skenesborough. He brought in settlers, put up sawmills, a gristmill and foundry, built ships on the lake, and opened a road to Albany. He was active in politics and community service as a militia leader, judge, and postmaster.

On a trip to England in 1775, Skene sought an audience with the King to create another colony that would include the Ticonderoga and Lake Champlain areas. Upon his return from England he was arrested in Philadelphia, confined to Connecticut and eventually exchanged. After his arrest, Skene declared himself a loyalist and joined the British cause; as a loyalist his property was confiscated. Skene, under General Howe's command in New York City, eventually traveled to Canada and was part of the Burgoyne Campaign. He was part of one of the major fiascos of the Burgoyne Campaign with the loss at Bennington. After the Revolutionary War ended, Skene returned to New York State and tried to reclaim his land and property but was refused. He returned to England where he bought an estate and lived on it until his death in 1810.

Gary Shattuck served more than three decades in law enforcement in Colorado and Vermont and served as a federal prosecutor, working with governments in Kosovo and Iraq. Since retiring, he has written numerous books and articles on obscure aspects of Vermont history from a legal perspective, among them "The Rebel and the Tory: Ethan Allen, Phillip Skene, and the Dawn of Vermont."

Shattuck's program will focus upon primary sources he has not used in his book. The presentation will examine the impact that the law, war, family, environment and immigration had on Skene in his settling and subsequent loss of a frontier community.

Jackson's Obadiah Brown, Revolutionary War Patriot

The Wells-Coulter Cemetery located in Jackson, New York, hasn't had a burial in 120 years. It has 39 souls, 19 of whom were alive during the Revolutionary War. In this cemetery, visitors will find the resting place of a Revolutionary War veteran, Obadiah Brown. He kept a diary that provides a fascinating glimpse into the life and hardships of a soldier in 1776. He was born August 9, 1753, in Canterbury, Windham County, Connecticut. His father and mother were John and Lucy. After his mother died in Connecticut in 1773, the family made their way to the Berkshires, residing in Gageborough. Originally, Gageborough was named in honor of British General Gage. After the Revolution, the name was changed to Windsor for Windsor, Connecticut. Obadiah's father died there in 1819. Windsor, Massachusetts, remains today a picturesque little town with a population of about 800.

At the start of the Revolutionary War, Obadiah would have heard news of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill. In November 1775, Washington sent Henry Knox to Ticonderoga for the cannons and artillery needed at the Siege of Boston. Knox traveled back through the Berkshires and at this time Obadiah decided to join the fight. He enlisted as a Private on January 1, 1776, signing on for one year. The 8th Massachusetts Line mustered under Captain Asa Barnes and Colonel Paul Dudley Sargent. Eventually, the 8th would be enveloped into the Continental Army as the 16th Regiment commanded by General Israel Putnam. Obadiah's company marched to Cambridge to take part in the Siege of Boston, and he remained there until July 1776. This is where he kept his diary, which notes his daily duties on and off guard. He describes excursions to surrounding towns for food like apples and walnuts. One day he went to see what Harvard College looked like, and went to Charlestown and Chelsea. He tells of bombing attacks and raiding attempts by the British Regulars to steal their cows and the Patriots reciprocated. He describes disciplinary actions, men being whipped and drummed out of the regiment, and even mentions two men who drank thirty-three glasses of brandy and gin—and one of them died! (If interested, visit the Massachusetts Historical Society website <https://www.masshist.org/database/1908> to read all 64 pages.)

In July 1776, he was drafted out to Colonel Thomas Knowlton's Regiment of Rangers headed for New York. Knowlton's Rangers were a famous spy unit established by George Washington to perform reconnaissance and espionage. Obadiah served under Knowlton alongside Nathan Hale. Knowlton's Rangers took part in several battles and are now considered to be one of the predecessors of our modern-day special forces. On September 16, 1776, Knowlton's Rangers were scouting and became engaged in what would be known as the Battle of Harlem Heights. While on patrol, they encountered British General Leslie. Under heavy fire, Obadiah was shot in the left elbow by a musket ball and Knowlton was killed. Many were captured by the British.

Obadiah Brown states in his pension application that although his injury left him unfit for duty, he remained in the Army to complete his years of service. After he recuperated, he volunteered for another month from July to August 1777 in Captain Whitmarsh's Company of Massachusetts Militia. They were marched to Saratoga to serve under the command of Philip Schuyler, who was retreating from Fort Edward toward Saratoga. Obadiah was then discharged. He enlisted a third time for another month under Captain William Clark from September to October 1777. They were marched to Shaftsbury, Vermont, but were hastily called back. His enlistment ended and he was discharged. Perhaps the rest of the company made it back in time to take part in the Siege of Saratoga. The injury to his arm would have left him struggling to get by. Fortunately, he was awarded a pension in 1798. He reapplied in 1818 and was granted a continuance that remained for the rest of his life. His pension application tells his story in his own words (visit Fold3.com).

Not much information can be found regarding his life after the war. He is listed in Cambridge and Jackson on the censuses from 1790 through 1830. A few family trees list a son, John, born in Cambridge, NY in 1783. He also possibly had two daughters, Clarissa and Philenda. Vital birth records are difficult to find (visit Ancestry.com or Familysearch.com). He is shown on the tax rolls in the 1800's. In Johnson's *1878 History of Washington County*, he is noted as a Town Collector in 1804, a Justice of the Peace in 1807, and a Commissioner of Schools in 1810. His wife, Prudence Collins, died in January 1825 at age 65. Obadiah lived another ten years, dying at age 81 on Christmas Day, December 25, 1834. He is buried beside his wife in Wells-Coulter Cemetery.

- Submitted by Sarah Hall

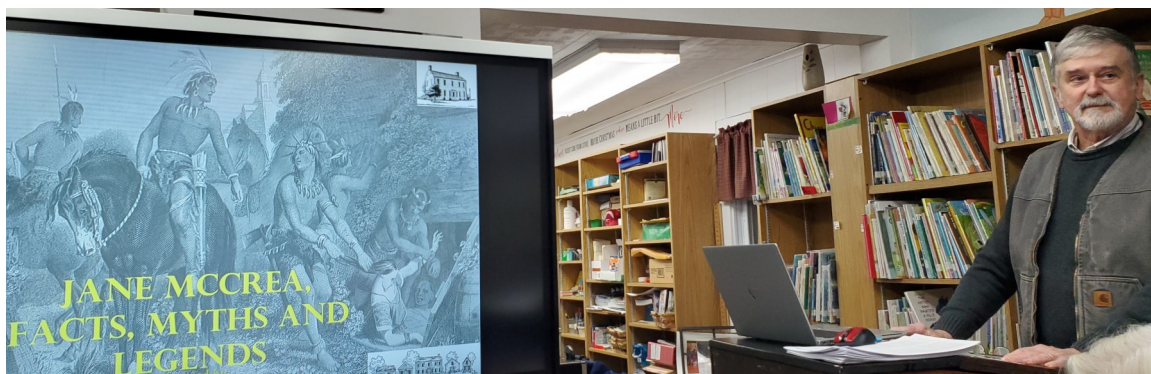
Local Historian Presents on Jane McCrea

Fort Edward Town Historian Paul McCarty led a program telling the story of the death of Jane McCrea on Thursday, January 18, 2024, at the Fort Edward Free Library in Fort Edward. The program was sponsored by the Washington County 250th Committee and the Fort Edward Free Library.

The program unraveled myths that surrounded the life and death of Jane McCrea and reviewed who Jane McCrea was, how she came to Fort Edward during Burgoyne's invasion of the North Country, her capture, and how she was killed. The audience learned about several reasons for the burial and reburial of McCrea. She was initially buried on Route 4 south of Fort Edward, moved to State Street Cemetery at a later date, and finally moved to Union Cemetery across from Washington County Municipal Center. Paul gave an in-depth explanation of the DNA testing that proved that not only Jane's, but also Sarah McNeil's, bones were buried together (Sarah was the woman Jane was visiting when she was captured).

Well-known historian Richard Ketchum stated in his book, *Saratoga*: "Her (McCrea's) demise was one of the first and in some respects the most dramatic of the atrocities now being committed almost daily by Burgoyne's Indians, and coming on the heels of his earlier threats, it made for extremely effective propaganda." The presentation also covered the effect that McCrea's death had on the campaign.

Paul McCarty has been Fort Edward Town Historian for nearly fifty years. He has researched and written numerous articles on Washington County and, specifically, Fort Edward history. McCarty is the go-to historian on topics such as Jane McCrea, Solomon Northup, and the Champlain Canal. He has been interviewed for several historical documentaries on various topics including the death of Jane McCrea and has spoken throughout the area on these topics as well.



Paul McCarty speaking about Jane McCrea.

Greenwich-Easton Historical Association Holds Annual Meeting

The Greenwich-Easton Historical Association held its Annual Meeting on Sunday March 10, 2024, at 2:00 p.m. in the community room of the Greenwich Free Library located at the corner of Academy and Main Streets in Greenwich, NY. The program opened with a brief business meeting followed by an engaging, informative, and entertaining presentation entitled "First Nations: The History and Traditions of the Indigenous People of the Greenwich-Easton Area" presented by Dr. Joseph Bruchac, storyteller and Executive Director of the Ndinakina Education Center in Greenfield Center, NY.

Dr. Bruchac was raised in Greenfield Center by his maternal grandparents. He received his BA from Cornell University, Masters from Syracuse University, and a PhD in Comparative Literature from Union Institute and is a citizen of the Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk Abenaki Nation. Named 2023-2025 Poet Laureate of Saratoga Springs, NY, Joe is a prolific poet and author with over 180 books published. He is the founder of the Greenfield Review Press, which has published over 150 contemporary books and anthologies giving voice to the otherwise voiceless and marginalized. It was a fascinating program and well attended.

- Submitted by Nancy Jo Davidsen

Salem Author and Historian Shares American Revolution Program

The Washington County 250th Committee and the Historic Salem Courthouse in Salem, NY recently co-sponsored a program led by Salem author and local historian William “Al” Cormier (pictured at right). The event was held on February 28, 2024, with over thirty people in attendance, focusing on the human and professional life of one of the founding citizens of Washington County, General John Williams.



General Williams was one of the founders of New Perth (currently Salem), New York. He was a surgeon and businessman in Salem as well as politician, soldier, community member, and family man.

Born, raised, and educated in England, General Williams finished his studies in medicine and surgery and emigrated to the colonies, settling in Salem in 1773, then in the county of Charlotte (later changed to Washington County).

In 1775, Williams was first elected to the New York Provincial Congress and served three terms. He went on to serve as one of the first county judges, Salem supervisor, and served in both the New York State Assembly and Senate. Additionally, he was a member of the New York State Constitutional Committee that ratified the United States Constitution in 1789.

Throughout the Revolutionary War, Williams served both as a New York State representative as well as Colonel of the Charlotte County Militia. He led the Charlotte County Militia to the Battle of Bennington in 1777. He was appointed Brigade General in 1786.

Williams died at the age of 53 on July 22, 1806. He was buried in the Salem Revolutionary Cemetery (shown in the photo at right), and was later reinterred in the Evergreen Cemetery in Salem.

Al Cormier, currently Salem’s deputy town historian, has researched and written numerous books and articles on the history of Salem, the Battenkill, railroading, and other local history. His latest book, “The Heart of Salem,” chronicles the history of Salem through stories of people from its origins up to 2009.



WCHS 2024 Board of Trustees

OFFICERS

President	Patrick Niles
Vice President	Susan Lynch
Treasurer	Jeanne Lapoint Wood
Secretary	Kelly Mead

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Jennifer LaRock

TRUSTEES—2026

Jane Hartnett
Sarah Hall

TRUSTEES — 2025

Debi Craig
Gary Hart
John A. Mead

TRUSTEES—2024

Nancy Jo Davidsen
Eric Huntington
Kathy Huntington

STANDING COMMITTEES:

Building — Eric Huntington
Finance — Melanie Bock
Nominations — John A. Mead

TRUSTEE EMERITA

Joan Handy

WCHS HISTORIAN

John A. Mead



WASHINGTON COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY EST. 1940

167 Broadway, Fort Edward NY 12828-1709

Telephone (518) 747-9108

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Spring 2024 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