



WASHINGTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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WINTER 2025 NEWSLETTER

Volume XXXV #4

WCHS Hosts Holiday Open House



In the spirit of the season, our board members and volunteers hosted a holiday open house at the Society's headquarters, the Wing-Northup House, on November 29, 2025. There were refreshments available, tours of the house, children's story time and draft animal wagon rides in the village. A fundraising basket raffle was conducted, congratulations to the winners! This opportunity introduced our organization to visitors who took photos with Santa. Here are a few images from the event. Thank you to all those who visited! If you couldn't make it, feel free to visit our headquarters building throughout the year during our open hours for research in our Heritage Library, or visit our WCHS Bookstore (at the Society headquarters, 167 Broadway, Fort Edward, NY).

The Society will be open for special holiday hours from 9:30 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. on December 17 for holiday shopping. WCHS members receive a 10% discount on all purchases made at the Wing-Northup House Bookstore as a membership benefit. We wish our members a very happy holiday season.



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

Library and Bookshop Hours:

Now open Tuesdays and Wednesdays
9:30 a.m.—4:30 p.m.

Visits may be scheduled by appointment
(contact us)

Inquiries and appointment requests
can be emailed to library@wchs-ny.org
or made by phone.

Newsletter Editor:
Kelly Mead

How To Contact Us:



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Fort Edward, NY 12828



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President's Letter: December 2025 Term in Review

Dear WCHS Members,

2025 is winding down, and my days as President of the Washington County Historical Society are also winding down. The Society has made improvements in several areas, including reviewing the bylaws, simplifying procedures, enhancing organization, improving public relations, refining programming, expanding outreach, streamlining nominations, strengthening society personnel, and enhancing our fundraising. When many small historical organizations are faltering, WCHS has improved. 2024 saw many changes that altered the Society's past workings. The organization saw a longtime board member and over twenty-year Financial Chair of WCHS, Kay Tomasi, move into retirement. Kay was a steady force in keeping the Society financially solvent. Over the past two years, the new administrator, the Finance Committee, and I have worked to maintain those procedures. With her departure, losing Kay's knowledge, skill, and dedication has been devastating, but the Finance Committee has continued to push forward to protect our assets.

The Society's bylaws were approved in 2001. There have been additions to the bylaws over the past twenty-four years, but no central review or amendments have been made. The WCHS Bylaws Committee spent nine months reviewing, clarifying, and revising the bylaws that govern our organization. The bylaws were approved by the membership at the start of 2025. The Society, after many years, has begun small but meaningful efforts to raise funds. In 2024, we held the first WCHS yard sale, which raised over \$1,000. We also organized a second yard sale in July of that year, raising significantly more than the first. Additionally, we initiated quarterly visits to a local restaurant for benefit nights. We continued this practice in 2025, visiting Falcons Brewhouse in Hudson Falls in April with a large turnout of board members and volunteers, who raised funds for the Society. In October, we visited The Railyard Taproom and Restaurant in Whitehall, raising additional funds and supporting another Washington County business. Though these are small events, they are becoming a regular practice and are likely to grow in size in the future. For the first time in a long while, the Society opened the Wing-Northup House to the public on Saturday, November 29, for pictures with Santa, basket raffles, displays, and wagon rides for families. We hope the event will not only raise money and increase exposure for the Society, but also revive a past tradition that can expand in the coming years.

Social media is an essential tool in any organization's toolkit for promoting events, explaining activities, and spreading its message. WCHS considers itself a collaborative partner with town and village historians, as well as other historical organizations throughout the county. Our administrator, Sarah Hall, has used our Facebook page to promote historical events across the county and our email account to send a list of upcoming events to our members and supporters. Because of her efforts, we've increased our Facebook followers and seen higher attendance at our programs and fundraising events.

Debi Craig, WCHS Programming Chair, has worked with several historical organizations, including the Greenwich-Easton Historical Association, the Hebron Preservation Society, and the Washington County 250th Committee. We have hosted programs on Susan B. Anthony, Soldiers of the American Revolution, the American Revolution in Washington County, Benedict Arnold at the Battles of Saratoga, and Henry Knox's Heavy Metal Tour. We have also held programs in Greenwich, Argyle, and Hebron for the first time in many years. We aim to continue and expand these partnerships to provide programming throughout the county.

In 2024, with a grant from the Washington County Home for Aged Women, the Society received funding for audio and video equipment. We have launched a YouTube channel and are now posting our programs and other historical events there. We plan to conduct interviews with historians from around the county and region in the future to share the history of our local area. We also hope to expand our program to include regional and national authors discussing topics related to our region.

Finally, over the past two years, we have experienced a significant turnover of board members and staff, resulting in the loss of experience and expertise at WCHS. The good news is that we have recruited both younger and retired individuals with a wide range of experience in nonprofit organizations. The new members, as well as our volunteers, have been willing to take on responsibilities and push the Society forward. That said, John Mead, who has been a member of the Washington County Historical Society board for over 30 years, will once again assume the presidency. Alec McMorris, a two-year board member, will serve as Vice President. We now have a potent mix of young and experienced board members for the upcoming two years. The Society has improved for several reasons, but the most important is that the board, volunteers, and administration share a passion for history, are willing to collaborate, and genuinely enjoy being together. Come into WCHS, see the organization, the joy of people working together, and finally, enjoy the positive atmosphere, which is contagious. Happy Holidays, and have a great New Year.

Respectfully yours,

Pat Niles, Outgoing Washington County Historical Society President

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT! December 13, 2025 **Henry Knox's Noble Artillery Train Reenactment**

In celebration of our country's 250th anniversary, cannons will parade from Fort Edward High School to the Old Fort House Museum on the Knox Trail on Saturday, December 13. Latest updates and details will be posted on the WCHS website, our Facebook page, and in local news media and social media outlets.



The parade starts at 9:00 a.m. at the Fort Edward High School, but the Knox Train reenactment of the cannons on sleds pulled by horses will join the route at the bottom of the hill near the Irving Tissue entrance.

Wreaths will be laid at the monuments in front of the Hudson Falls Library* Fort Edward School, and Fort Miller Canal Lock Road. (**Please note, the wreath laying at the Hudson Falls Library will take place at 8:30 a.m., before the parade begins in Fort Edward.*) The Old Fort House Museum will be open extended hours for the celebration from 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

At 10:30 a.m., the parade will pick up at Fort Miller.

At 1:00 p.m., Washington County will hand off the sleds loaded with cannons to Saratoga County. This takes place in the center of the Dix Bridge in Hudson Crossing Park in Greenwich and will continue to the Fort Hardy Park Field of Grounded Arms in Schuylerville, along the Old Champlain Canal Towpath.

From 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m., the Knox Festival continues in Fort Hardy Park in Schuylerville with historians, draft animal wagon rides, artillery demonstrations, food, etc. The Visitor Center will be open.

WCHS 85th Annual Membership Meeting Held

The 85th WCHS Annual Membership Meeting and Awards Ceremony was held on Saturday, October 25, in Whitehall, NY at Skene Manor. Attendees enjoyed light refreshments and conversation before the business meeting began at 10 a.m. Participants received a packet of written materials and reports and committee chairpersons reviewed their achievements and work from the past year. Members present voted and approved the proposed WCHS Nominations Slate and the 2026 WCHS Budget as submitted.

Awards were presented in several categories (see below), and we welcomed our guest speaker, Thomas Ruffing, Washington County Historian, for an update on Washington County history and tourism. Attendees then enjoyed a luncheon in the lovely Skene Manor building. (Read more about the history of Skene Manor and Whitehall on pages 5-7.)

WCHS President's Awards were presented to:



Beverly Raymond for setting up the AV and audio equipment to launch our video outreach program to the community. (Beverly Raymond with Pat Niles, left photo.)

Arlyne Henley for her efforts to improve the appearance of the Wing-Northup House, for her organizational work, and any other requested initiatives. (Arlyne Henley with Pat Niles, right photo.)

Deborah Agan Guynup for her tireless work on researching and recording the records of the American Revolutionary Soldiers buried in Washington County. (Deborah was not in attendance, her award was presented to her at a later date.)

WCHS Preservation Awards were presented to:



Tom and Rulyn Graves were chosen for the Adaptive Rescue Award for Clutch Market and General Store in Greenwich. Clutch Market was remodeled while preserving its historic architectural features, creating a home for a functional business and a successful historic renovation. (Rulyn Graves with Pat Niles, left photo.)

Heidi Knecht-Seegers and Dr. Paul Seegers, received The Exterior Award, which was given for the renovation of the Seegers' home. The Knecht-Seegers rebuilt the front porch while preserving its past architectural features. (The award recipients were not in attendance at the meeting, and Historian Thomas Ruffing accepted the award on their behalf.)

The annual James R. Cronkhite Award was presented to:



Dale and Coral Grinnell to recognize them for their many contributions to the Society and local history. The Grinnells are longtime supporters and volunteers of the Society, often seen at the Wing-Northup house in Fort Edward. Their time filling spots in the Caboose or our booth in the County Bounty Building at the Washington County Fair for many years was invaluable. Dale served on the Board as well as our Treasurer for many years. Dale and Coral could always be counted on to lend a hand and be present at events and activities put on by the Washington County Historical Society. (Paul McCarty, with Coral Grinnell and Dale Grinnell, left photo.)

Skene Manor—Life on Mountain Terrace

Looking out of an upstairs window of her magnificent home situated on the side of a mountain, Catharine Potter could see the town laid out down below—the stores, the silk factory, the lumber yards, the canal, the lake, the creek, the train tracks, the hotels, and the bustling of the people. This was 1876, the beginning of the Gilded Age—a prosperous period of rapid economic growth, and this area was no exception. A few years prior, Catharine and her husband, State Supreme Court Judge Joseph Potter, had moved into their castle-like home, complete with the steeply peaked roofs, the arched windows, the towers, the dormers, and the corbels they had designed with Isaac Hobbs, a distinguished architect from Philadelphia. Almon Hopson was the local contractor who brought the plans to life. They used local materials as much as possible. Sandstone blocks were quarried out of the mountain and set up by Italian artisans who had learned a treatment called ashlar masonry. The blocks were evenly cut and made so that all sides were smooth except the front-facing side which was “rough tooled.” The stonemason was Richard Lewis from a nearby town where he sourced the slate he used for the Manor’s roofs and fireplaces. Welsh artisans skillfully honed the fireplaces. Mary Tillinghast had a studio in the area and was the artisan who designed and made the beautiful stained-glass windows.

The Potters had named their home “Mountain Terrace”. The town they lived in was Whitehall in upstate New York with over 5,000 inhabitants. The mountain it was situated on was called Skene Mountain after British Army Captain Philip Skene who founded the town in 1759. The creek was Wood Creek. The lake was Lake Champlain, and the canal was the Champlain Canal. Wood Creek was situated north from where the Hudson River veered west in Glens Falls. In the early days, before the canal and trains were in existence, traveling by water was the fastest and safest way to go. For those travelers who wanted to continue to go north, Wood Creek showed them the way to Lake Champlain and strategic places north such as Fort Ticonderoga and Canada. This included the early settlers, then the French and Indian warriors, then the American Revolution soldiers, and then the War of 1812 soldiers. At this period in 1876, the Creek was utilized in tandem with the Champlain Canal and was part of its operations. The Champlain Canal (opened in 1824) went from Waterford to Whitehall where it met Lake Champlain, running 124.9 miles north of Whitehall to Canada.

The tracks belonged to the Delaware and Hudson Railway. There were trains coming and going out of Whitehall to Saratoga Springs and points beyond. Another line had just opened to Rouses Point. At that location, passengers could now connect with other lines which could take them to Montreal or Quebec. Unfortunately, it decreased the need for steamship travel. Before this time, railway traffic could go no further than Whitehall. Train passengers coming into Whitehall would board a steamship to go further north by way of Lake Champlain. From there, the passengers could get to Ticonderoga, Burlington, Plattsburgh, by way of the Richelieu River in Canada, Quebec City. Or by boat, by way of the Champlain Canal and briefly the Erie Canal out of Waterford, travelers could head south, then enter the Hudson River which would take them to Troy, Albany, Poughkeepsie, and New York City. The residents were well served by canal and railroad transportation; however, for shorter travel, horse and buggy was the way to go.

Catharine could see the businesses on Canal Street down below. The architecture of each of the brick buildings was different from one another and reflected the ornate style of the 1800s such as Gothic Revival, Italianate, and Second Empire. There were so many stores that Catharine could see from her perch such as Whitehall Steam, Laundry, and Drying; Vannier’s Blacksmith and Wood Shop; Marion’s Dress Shop; the Champlain House complete with a pool table; as well as R.M. Witherbee’s on the corner of Canal and Clinton Streets who advertised selling “fine groceries”. The W.H. Murray store said in their advertisements, “We sell people just what they want and give them just what they buy.” The advertisement went on to say that customers could pay them in cash or in farm produce. As an inducement, they were given a market basket or a boat brush providing they bought at least \$5 worth of goods.

Catharine stared at what was left of the Hall’s Hotel which had recently burned down. There were many other places for people to stay, but the Hall’s Hotel was located right in the middle of town. It was such a shame, but Whitehall was a bustling place and Catharine felt sure there would be a replacement in no time. The Halls also built the Opera House which opened the year before. With a 1,500-person seating capacity and its elegant interior, it was able to attract great talent to the area to hold plays and concerts. In the winter, they provided an outdoor skating rink. This was in addition to skating on the canal. It was such a joyous sight for Catharine to behold on beautiful winter days when the snow coated everything in white. (*Continued page 6...*)

An explosion of commerce was in evidence along the docks. Logs that had been floated across Lake Champlain from trees harvested from the vast Canadian woods were cut and planed right there down below before they went on their way to points south to be sold. Farmers could be seen bringing their produce by horse and wagon to be put on the canal boats or the freight trains to reach their markets. Fuel, such as coal and iron ore, were being brought in and distributed. An amazing number of boats of all sizes could be seen either in operation or being built or restored.

The Champlain Silk Mill had just opened and people were seen going in and out of the building; some worked there and some were delivering raw materials such as raw silk they imported from China to be made into thread and cloth. As much as such industries as the lumber business created jobs for men, the Silk Mill provided jobs for women to operate the looms and to do other functions. One could not miss the huge cube-shaped building holding the big machines needed. Catharine was upset to hear children were being allowed to work there. It had to be dangerous with all the equipment in close proximity. The fumes from the dyes and other chemicals used could not be good for the workers' lungs, especially the children's. Also, those poor children had to work the same work week as everyone else—12 to 14 hours a day, six days a week. However, not that this made up for it, silk made in Whitehall was in high demand all over the country.

There were many bridges to be seen crossing the Canal and Creek connecting the eastern and western parts of the town. Some were for public use such as the pedestrian bridge, the bridge at Canal Street where Saunders Street intersected, and the covered bridge further north near the train station. Other bridges were for private use by the individual mills up and down the Canal and Creek. Another bridge was called a change bridge which allowed the animals pulling the canal boats and steamships to be walked over to the other side of the canal, when changing direction, without the need to unharness them. The trains had their own bridge as well.

As Catharine was lost in her thoughts, Judge Potter was in his office doing some daydreaming of his own. He admired his study and its masculine feel. He had chosen to wrap the lower part of the walls in brown leather. With the heavy dark mahogany woodwork, it made it dim. However, it was broken up by the contrasting wallpaper that was used above the leather. The floor-to-ceiling shutters and the elongated windows gave the room texture and also made it lighter. He marveled at how wonderful his dream castle had turned out. From a distance, his Victorian-Gothic home made for a nice silhouette against the mountainous background and the terraced lawn in front. It could be seen for miles around and was much admired. He liked that.

The manor had 17 rooms spread out over three floors. The third floor was mostly used for workmen who needed a place to sleep. Also, it made a great storage area for provisions or furnishings they were not using. The second floor included the large master bedroom and the adjoining sitting room. The doorway between the two rooms revealed the thickness of the walls. In the building of the Manor, the Judge remembered a decision, and a good one, to make all of the walls supporting ones to hold up the weight of what was going on above. In the corner of the hallway, at the top of the stairs, there was the bedroom for the housekeeper. It was close to the back stairway which went down to the kitchen. Beside the little room the Judge used as a dressing room, all the rest were bedrooms, with their own closets, awaiting their living sons' family visits as well as friends who came to see them. The rooms were a decent size and the wide hall connecting them had 14-foot ceilings as in the rest of the house. There were many tall windows which made this floor well lit. There was a water closet at the end of the hall where a galvanized tub was filled with water from a cistern above which collected rainwater. A pipe guided the water through a portable hot water heater then delivered the water to the tub. Catharine was happy to have this convenience but wished her bath water was a bit warmer.

Heading downstairs, one came face to face with a beautiful, multi-colored, elongated stained-glass window and the staircase curved to the right. At the bottom stood a figurine holding a gas-fueled lantern, sculpted by Auguste Moreau, a French sculptor, on the newel post lighting the way. As much as the second floor hallway was bright, the first floor one was dark requiring gas-lit lanterns be hung on the wall. The hallway had the same 14-foot ceilings with wide dark mahogany crown molding at the ceiling. Inlays of plaster, painted a cream color with a feathering technique applied, broke up the dark woodwork. The floors were of a light wood bordered by a Greek-key pattern in a contrasting darker wood stain. (*Continued page 7...*)

To preserve the wood, colorful carpets were placed on the floor without covering up the border. On the wall, between the crown molding and the inlays, there was wallpaper imported from Europe which was called "The Falcon Frieze" depicting a medieval hunt.

Across from the Judge's study or turning left after entering the main entrance, which also had a beautiful yellow stained-glass window above, was a sitting parlor where guests were received. The home had eight fireplaces, and this was the only room that had a marble one. All the others were made of slate, which was in abundance locally, and were made to look like marble as well using a technique well known by the Welsh craftsmen they hired.

As the visitors were being chatted up by the Potters, their help, mostly hired locals, could be heard behind the closed pocket doors, setting up the table in the adjoining dining room. Upon opening the doors, one saw another stunning fireplace to the right. To the left, a beautiful chandelier hung above. It nicely set off the dining table below and the gilded panel molding on the ceiling which outlined the dining table in a rectangular fashion.

The Judge was satisfied with the many bedrooms available for his three living sons and their growing families. At 32, Sanford was following his lead. He had a thriving law practice in Whitehall and owned a brick house lower on the mountain. William was now 28 and had joined the navy and was stationed all over the world. The Judge and Catharine had set up a map room on the third floor where they tracked the places their son had been stationed. Henry, at 19, was working towards a degree in engineering at Union College, the Judge's alma mater but his degree was in law.

The Judge admired the heaviness and deeply carved dark mahogany of the two entrance doors. Besides the main entrance, there was a porte cochere for when there was inclement weather. If their guests did come in that way, there was a sitting room and a water closet to the right where they could freshen up. The Judge thought to himself that he and his wife had achieved so much. This home represented the pinnacle of their experience together as husband and wife. They had had some misfortunes like the death of their nine-year-old boy Joseph Boies Potter. Also, the last pregnancy ended with the baby being stillborn. These two things had affected them deeply and had been hard to get past. But here they were! He had never seen Catharine happier and that pleased him so much. As a matter of fact, where was Catharine? He climbed the stairs and found her looking out the window. As she saw him coming towards her, she said gayly, "You know, Joseph, there is not a bad view out of any of these windows. I noticed the gardeners are doing an excellent job with the terrace. Look down there. That hyacinth bush has started blooming and it is beautiful." He responded by saying, "It is beautiful just like you, Catharine," as he gave her a little hug. "Let's take a stroll, we can take a closer look." Catharine said, "I'd like that," as she gave him her hand and he tucked it comfortably under his arm as they went downstairs and out the door.

Written and submitted by Jan Peterson
Washington County Historical Society, 11/15/25

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WCHS HISTORIAN

John A. Mead

The Washington County Historical Society would like to thank Casella Waste Systems, Inc. for their generous donation of service for the Wing-Northup House. Thank you!





WASHINGTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY EST. 1940

167 Broadway, Fort Edward NY 12828-1709

Telephone (518) 747-9108

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Winter 2025 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)

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1. I would like to receive my newsletter by email

Yes No

2. I would like to be contacted about volunteering

Yes No