

The Rensselaerville Press

📖 A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE RENSSELAERVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY 📖

"Today is Tomorrow's History"

Spring 2019

The Mill That Huyck Built

By **Katie Barker Caprio**

Of the 10 miles of footpaths that weave through the lands of the Edmund Niles Huyck Preserve, perhaps the most traveled and best known is the Falls Trail. The trail begins at the Mill House in the hamlet of Rensselaerville and travels 500 feet along the northern banks of Ten-Mile Creek to just below the 150-foot waterfall that the Preserve and the hamlet have become known for. As the Falls come into view, so does a little red footbridge, a platform from which to admire the majesty of the Falls, and a gateway to the rest of the Preserve's treasures.



The Huyck Mill (about 1870)

Just over the footbridge, to the left of the narrow path, lies an old stone foundation. The building that once stood here a hundred years ago is no more. Moss and lichens have grown over the stones that remain. The small trees, saplings, and the abundant ground-cover sprouting from within the foundation, are a living testimony to the ability of nature to reclaim an altered landscape. And, outside the stonework remains, the interested hiker may notice a large rock into which has been drilled a small bronze plaque with an etching of an old building and the words: "100 years serving the paper industry. Site of the original Huyck Felt Mill 1870-1878."

By the end of the 19th century, felt making had become an integral part of the paper-making process. Paper was made using big machines—wood pulp was mixed into a slurry, delivered to the continuous paper machines, pressed flat on giant conveyor belts, excess moisture removed, and processed into huge sheets of paper. The early American paper mills typically used rags for the drying process, but these rags were expensive (as many were imported from Europe) and were often in short supply. Some paper mills resorted to petitioning

the ladies, asking them to save their rags and donate them to the paper-making cause.

As the paper-making process became more mechanized during the mid-19th century, paper mills began to use drying belts that were made of more durable woolen felts to press out the water from the pulp fibers.

At first, American paper mills imported their felts from Europe, but later American entrepreneurs began to see opportunities for making the paper-making felts themselves. Among these were the Henry Waterbury and Francis Conkling Huyck partnership, which established the fourth ever felt-making mill in the country—in Rensselaerville, N.Y., in the year 1870.

The Waterbury-Huyck partnership seemed like a natural one. Mr. Waterbury possessed the know-how to successfully manufacture the felts and Mr. Huyck had an abundance of business savvy. They began operating in the old woolen mill that had been built at the turn of the 19th century, just below the Falls. The mill's original function was to card wool and finish cloth and return it to local farmers for their domestic needs. These services were still provided even after Mr. Waterbury and Mr. Huyck began running the mill. From 1870-1878, the mill manufactured papermakers' felts from wool brought from nearby farms and other areas. Each week the felts would be loaded onto wagons and taken to farmers' wives who would join the felts into endless, seamless blankets. Later the felts were returned to the mill for washing, fulling, and finishing. Although the company produced a high-quality product, its success was limited by transportation problems—since it was far from the railroad, it encountered difficulty selling and transporting the felts—as well as a lack of workers and raw materials.

In 1879, the partnership was dissolved. Mr. Waterbury decided to try his luck in Oriskany, in central New York, while Mr. Huyck rented an old knitting mill at Kenwood, a suburb of Albany. Soon F.C. Huyck and Sons was successfully manufacturing paper-making felts as well as woolen suits and blankets. Mr. Huyck ran the successful business from Kenwood and later, Rensselaer, N.Y., until his death on July 4, 1907. Shortly afterwards, the company was reorganized with Edmund Niles Huyck as president, John Niles Huyck as vice president and secretary, and Francis Conkling Huyck, Jr., as treasurer. Maintaining the tradition of F.C. Huyck Sr.'s policies and high standards, the company continued to be a leading manufacturer of papermakers' felts in the United States.

Today, that foundation on the trail is all that remains of the Waterbury and Huyck felt mill in Rensselaerville. After the mill

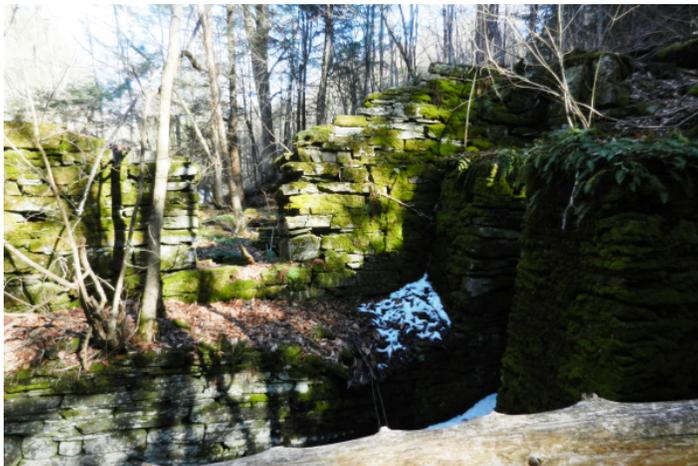
Continued on Page 2

The Mill That Huyck Built *Continued from page 1*

closed, all the machinery was removed and the building demolished. Even its accompanying outbuilding is gone, having been removed to the Shufelt farm, just outside the hamlet. Natural succession has since reclaimed this once-bustling business property, and around it has grown the beautiful Preserve that we all treasure and enjoy.



Today all that is left of the Huyck felt mill is a plaque and the mill foundation. Photo from Huyck Preserve.



The stone foundation of the Huyck felt mill. Photo from Huyck Preserve.

Can You Read Old English?

By Rose Kuhar

Many of the documents written before the early 1800's used an antiquated writing style where they substituted what looks like our present lower case "f" with an incomplete cross bar. This was used in place of the letter s when the s made a hard s sound. To even add another challenge double "ff" was used to replace "ss" in the middle of words. This is frequently seen in the spelling of Rensselaerwyck. "Renffelaerwyck" is found on many of Stephen Van Rensselaer early leases. As typesetting and printing press technology progressed the alphabet changed to our modern use of the letter "s".

We received a request for information on Ezekial Bundy and his daughter and her husband, Olive and Nathaniel Tolman. The only information inquirer had was that Nathaniel Tolman owned a store in Rensselaerville in 1794 that had burned. Having no record of the fire or this gentleman, Joyce Chase decided to do an internet research and typed in "1794 fire in Rensselaerville store burned". What popped up was *The New York Magazine or Literacy Repository*, October 1794. *The New York Magazine or Literacy Repository* was published in New York City from 1790-1797. It claimed to be one of the four most important magazines of its time.

The following is the article published in the magazine. Can you read the Old English version? A modern translation follows for your comparison.

(The New York Magazine or Literacy Repository for Oct - 1794 Number XL -Vol. IV, Page 650 headlines for page titled Domestic Occurrences)

Albany - October 6

On the night of Saturday, the 27 ult. the store occupied by Nathaniel Tolman, on Renffelaerville and the houfe of Jonathan Hayton, adjoining were confumed by fire. Mr. Tolman being abfent, Mr. Hayton was awaken by the noife of flames, between hours of 11 and 12 and on running out, difcovered the infide of the store to be in a flame; and from the wind blowing ftrong from the weft rapidly advancing to his houfe; he immediately, with the affiftance of his wife, carried out their children, and a confiderable part of their furniture, and before any aid could be had from the neighborhood, the ref were confumed. In the store was a confiderable quantity of goods and caff; which together with the store books, notes, and receipts were all confumed. As there had been no fire in the store for the fix months paft, it is fuppofed that fome malicious, perfon, has broke in and fet fire to the store.

(Translation)

On the night of Saturday, the 27 ult. the store occupied by Nathaniel Tolman, on Rensselaerville and the house of Jonathan Hayton adjoining was consumed by fire. Mr. Tolman was absent, Mr. Hayton was awoken by the noise of flames, between the hours of 11 and 12 and on running out discovered the inside of the store to be in flame; and from the wind blowing strong from the west rapidly advancing to his house; he immediately, with the assistance of his wife, carried out their children, and a considerable part of their furniture,

Continued on Page 3

This article first appeared in the Autumn 2008 issue of the Huyck Preserve's newsletter, the *Myosotis Messenger*.

Can You Read Old English? *Continued from page 2*

and before any aid could be had from the neighborhood, the rest was consumed. In the store, was a considerable quantity of goods and cash; which together with the store books, notes, and receipts were consumed. As there had been no fire in the store for the six months past, it is supposed that some malicious, designing person, had broken in and set fire to the store.

Does anyone know where this store was located?

If you found this fascinating why not volunteer with the research group they meet Wednesdays from 10:30-2 at the Grist Mill and winters at the Rensselaerville Library.

Volunteers Needed



Looking for individuals to work on web site, give tours and help in the research room. We are looking for individuals who like history and have a couple hours to spare. Tours are given on

Sundays and start in late June and run through September. Come and go on a tour to see if it is something you would like to try. Research is ongoing year round come for an hour or more. Starting in May on Wednesdays we are at the Mill and work on family and house genealogy, documents pertaining to our township and much more. You can either e-mail us at rensseleavillehistoricalsoc@gmail.com or call Rose at 518-797-3360 if you are interested. Do you know a student who needs volunteer hours this summer?

Hilltown Summit

The towns of Berne, Knox, Rensselaerville and Westerlo have been meeting four times a year to share what their organizations are planning for the year. The Rensselaerville Historic Society is hosting the June meeting on the first at the mill. The meeting starts at 10:00 and mill tours will be available after the meeting. Coffee and light snacks will be served. Everyone is welcome town officials, organizations and individuals who want to see our history kept alive.



Emails



The Historical Society is working on being able to send out mass emails. If we have your email address in the future we will keep you informed of events and programs.

Art Show



The Rensselaerville Historical Society is hosting its fourth Art Show of Rensselaerville residents. This year six youths have signed up plus twenty artists who live throughout the township. The Art Show will open Friday evening, July 19 with an Artist Reception. The show will be open the weekends of July 20, 21 and July 27, 28 plus Wednesday July 24. Here is a chance to see some amazing art plus a chance to glimpse inside of the historic mill.

Original Indenture for the Hamlet of Rensselaerville

By Rose Kuhar

Carlson's Auction House in Freehold was having their winter auction in January when Garrett Platel, a Rensselaerville Historical Society Trustee and part time worker for the auction house, saw a framed document that caught his eye. After looking over the document, he made a quick call to Rose Kuhar, the head of the research volunteers for RHS, to see if we had this document. The answer was "no", so after a quick conversation, a decision was made to bid on it. What did we get for \$200? From an historical find, it was like hitting the lottery. It was the original first deed of Great Lot 249, the lot that the whole village of Rensselaerville Falls is located. We have several deeds for various Great Lots throughout the township, but none are the very first deed on any piece of property. The indenture was a large document that was partly preprinted with areas left blank to be filled in with a quill pen using old English script. The document has two signatures Hans Winegar and Stephen Van Rensselaer.

Stephen Van Rensselaer owned 24 miles on both sides of the Hudson River. The most western part of these 24 acres is now the towns of Berne, Rensselaerville and Westerlo. In 1786-87, he hired William Cockburn to survey this land and break it into 160 acre lots. In 1787, there were only a scattering of crude log cabins on this land, mainly belonging to trappers. To encourage settlement, he offered the land to Revolutionary War soldiers and other hardy folks free for seven years if they cleared the land and improved it. Starting in 1787 and 1788 settlers started receiving indenture leases from Stephen Van Rensselaer.

The information on these early leases expands our knowledge of how our town was settled and who the brave individuals were who cleared the land to build a home for their young family. Stephen Van Rensselaer seemed to use what we would now call a template to create each indenture, leaving parts to be filled in by hand. What did we discover on this lease? First, that Stephen Van Rensselaer leased lot 249 to Hans Winegar. Who was Hans Winegar? With a little further research, it was discovered his name was Johannes Winegar. Hans and his sons came from Old Stockbridge, Massachusetts. The first thing they did

Continued on Page 4

Original Lease *Continued from page 3*

after obtaining their lease was to clear enough land to build a small log cabin in the vicinity of the present day Bell's Hotel on Main Street. From the 1800 Federal Census, we know he was a farmer. The date on the Indenture was April second in the year one thousand seven hundred and eighty eight. This is the first document where we have seen the price that was paid for this lease. It was five shillings. It also has the date of January second the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety-five this was the date when the Hans Winegar needs to start pay the yearly rent of thirty bushels of good merchantable winter wheat, four fat fowl and one days service of carriage and horses.

The location of this indenture doesn't include a town or village name since none existed yet, but does call it Basick. This term may have come from Native Americans. It is on a few other leases. The 1788 map of Great Lots has an early road called the Basic Path. The Basick Path ran from the East crossing our present Town Line Road near Chapel Hill Road crossing woods and hay fields until it hits the old Kuhar Farm and ends on the curve on County Route 351 above the playground. From the book Rensselaerville – Reminiscences and Rhymes it states "that it was originally an Indian trail, later used to transport military stores. This road was so covered by undergrowth as to only be passable by oxen teams."

Come to the Mill this summer and see this framed document. If anyone knows the origins and meaning of Basick please share it with us.

Mills Ten Eyck Jr. Plaque

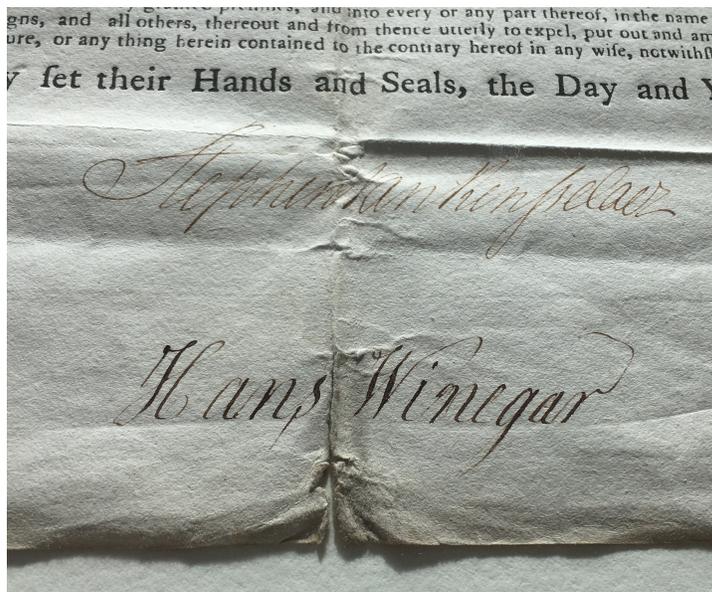
A plaque has been placed on the Garage that Mills Ten Eyck Jr. donated to the Rensselaerville Historical Society in 2009. For several years we had demonstrations of blacksmithing in this building and it is now used as a repair and storage building. His family generously donated money for the repairs to the building and requested a plaque in Mills's memory. The building has a new roof and cement floor through their donation.



Photo by Rose Kuhar

Public Viewing Our New Historic Document

On Saturday, May 25 the Rensselaerville Grist will be open from 10-2 and the public will be able view the original first lease for the hamlet of Rensselaerville. It was written between Stephen Van Rensselaer and Hans Winegar for Lot 249 on March 3, 1788.



Research Volunteers

will be meeting at the Mill On Wednesdays starting June 3 from 11-2.

The Board of Trustees Meeting

meetings are 2nd Monday of the Month.



Baked Goods are needed for our Fund Raiser. Items may be dropped off at the Mill at 9:30 on the second Monday of the Month. Please support our Fund Raiser.

Letter from the Past

February 2, 1944

Dear Ralph,

I have had a good many letters from the Rensselaerville boys all over the world acknowledging the airview postcards, but your letter certainly tops them all, and all of us in the family have read it with a great deal of interest.

I certainly understand your saying never appreciated the village so much until you were away from it. I felt that way fifteen years ago when I spent two years in Labrador and Newfoundland, and I can assure you I was mighty glad to get back. One of the things that pleases me most today is that my boys prefer to go there over my other place. I guess it just gets in your blood after a while –a-place like Rensselaerville.

It's funny to think of you being in Honolulu and Waikiki Beach and wishing you were back home; whereas most of us in peacetime would think it was the height of bliss to be out there and enjoying the warm weather and sunshine.

You are right in thinking that we are quite busy here. How long it will last, nobody knows; but it looks as though the demand for paper and blankets would continue for some time yet, and as long as it does, we should be busy. The amount of production that is being turned out by factories like ours, with fewer people than we had in 1941, is wonderful. It is, of course, due to the much longer hours we are working, and also, I know, to the desire to do our part here at home.

I haven't been in Rensselaerville since New Year's, but I am thinking of going with Dickie for a few days this weekend and may try to book a ride with your father. They always have worse weather out there than in Albany, but actually to date here it hasn't seemed bad, though we can't tell what February holds in store for us. I wouldn't think there had been as much snow in December and January as in normal years.

With best wishes and many thanks for your thoughtfulness in acknowledges in the cards, and looking forward to seeing you when you are next home.

Sincerely,
Dick Eldridge
EMH
Col. R. Britton, 32041492
Co. E. 106 Infantry
A.P.O. #27
c/o Postmaster
San Francisco, Calif.

The letter was written by Dick Eldridge who was born Francis Huyck Eldridge in Hempstead, Nassau County, New York. He was born March 9, 1905 to Lewis Angevine Eldridge and Elizabeth Moore Niles Huyck. Francis had seven brothers and sisters: Lewis, William, Harry, Bessie, Elizabeth, Edward and Roswell. Francis married Isabelle Sanford (1902-1988)



Dick Eldridge photo from John Eldridge

from Newfoundland, Canada. They had four children Francis Huyck Jr., Edmund, Thomas and Emily. Francis must have spent many summers at his Grandparents in Rensselaerville. As an adult he lived in Albany but owned a summer home next to the Presbyterian Church in Rensselaerville. Francis worked for F.C. Huyck & Sons who had built a new mill in Rensselaer for the manufacturing of papermaker's felts. Francis was the President of F.C. Huyck & Sons when he died August 3, 1947 only three years after writing this letter.

Eldridge information provided by John Eldridge.

Ralph Britton was born in a farmhouse in the Town of Westerlo. He was a long-time resident of Rensselaerville, moving here in 1932. He attended the Rensselaerville Union Academy for 6 years. Ralph's parents, William and Cora Britton, established a home and business, "Britton's Fruits and Vegetables, Finke's Ice Cream" and later the US Post Office. Previously their home was Philip Fritch's Cabinet Making Shop.



Ralph Britton photo from Diana Fritz

Ralph Britton served in the US Army from January 1941 through May 1945, and was a corporal in Company E 106th Infantry, 27th Division. He served three years in the Pacific, Majuro in the Marshall Islands, Battle of Saipan in the Marianas, and Espirito Santo, New Hebrides. He received the Bronze Star and was given an award for Conspicuous Service by the State of New York.

Following his military service, Ralph worked at the Huyck Mill in Rensselaer as a weaver. He and his wife Magdalena operated Britton's Soda Fountain in Rensselaerville for nearly 20 years. He was postmaster in Rensselaerville for 26 years. Ralph was a charter member of the Rensselaerville Volunteer Fire Company, serving as treasurer for 37 years. He was also a member of the 27th Division Associated Post 11 for many years. Ralph passed away August 27, 2005 at the age of 86.

Diana Britton Fritz shared her father's history.

Paint the Mill



The 2017 and 2018 goal of \$20,000 to raise funds to paint the mill and garage/repair shop was met last fall through the generous support from many of you. This money was used to paint and repair three sides of the mill and the basement level of the back of the mill. We hope to continue to raise money this summer so we can tackle the back of the mill which will need a four stories of scaffolding.



Plant and Bake Sale Fund Raiser



This year the Historical Society is adding a plant sale to its annual Memorial Day weekend Bake Sale. The sale will be on Saturday, May 25 from 10-1 at the Mill on Main Street.

Date: _____

Membership Year July 1 to June 30
Membership (new or renewal)

Check off what you are sending

- Individual Membership \$10.00
- Family Membership 15.00
- Sponsorship Membership 30.00
- Life Membership 150.00
- Donation to Paint the Mill ____.
- Other Donation ____.
- Gift Membership ____.



Name: _____

Street or PO Box: _____

Town, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Alternate Mailing Address and when to use this if you are a
"seasonal" resident (the Post Office will not forward our
Newsletter or other 3rd class mail): _____

Name: _____

Street or PO Box: _____

Town, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

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