

Calendar

February 4

GPS Meeting

7:00– 7:30

Social Half Hour

7:30 Business Meeting

8:00 Program

Table of Contents

Page 1

February GPS Update

Page 2

Covered Bridges
by Lou Brown

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February GPS Update

From Virginia Sawicki and Bonnie Donnan

Happy winter! The temperatures we have been experiencing this past week remind us that we really caught a break last year.

The program at our January meeting was Harry Steven on “Schenectady’s Locomotive History”. Thanks to the Galway Public Library for the use of their projector, and thanks to Margie Prasek for her technical assistance. Our February 4th speaker will be Maxine Getty in the person of Rebecca Cameron, a 19th century widow. We will learn about mourning and bereavement customs in the 1800s. Many will remember her presentation at an earlier meeting in the role of a civil war nurse.

The exhibit in the display cases “Dock’s Sketches: The Artistic Legacy of Clayton R. Dockstader” will be coming to an end. We plan to replace it with a showing of family heirlooms sometime in March. Be thinking about an item you might like to lend. It doesn’t have to be valuable, and can’t be too large. The heirloom is a representative of the past, something that has belonged to your family, something that is special to you or reminds you someone in the

past. Family heirlooms can also be stories, not only an item for the display case.

Congratulations and kudos to Patricia Kay. Her show “The Maya: An Artistic Homage”, a group of her gumoil prints and clay sculptures displayed at the Perrella Gallery at Fulton-Montgomery Community College was named in the Daily Gazette as one of the top ten visual arts exhibits of the year.

The County Clerk’s office has made census and naturalization records kept in the office available online. The database includes county census records from 1850 through 1925, state census records from 1845, 1865, 1875, and naturalization records from 1906 to 1928. The records can be reached by going to the county clerk’s page on the county website www.saratogacountyny.gov, and filing an “online records application”, and receiving the needed password. These records can also be seen at the clerk’s office on the public computers.

Keep our editor Kurt Johnston in mind for material about Galway for the newsletter.

Covered Bridges

By Lou Brown

Reprinted from the *Glowegee Scroll*
Summer 1982

A picture hanging on a wall in our home always seems to bring a feeling of peace and calm to my senses when viewing it. It depicts a rural scene, on a summer's day, of a red board "covered bridge" spanning a small skittering brook. On the grassy banks, wild flowers sway in the summer breeze as though encouraging the waters on to their final destination. Soft fleecy clouds float by overhead and the world is tranquil for a while.

During the early 1900's, we vacationed for a couple of weeks each summer at a boarding house in the town of Ashokan, near Kingston in the Catskill Mts. This lovely summer retreat disappeared under water when the Ashokan Reservoir was built. But, never to be forgotten were the afternoon horse and buggy rides in deep rutted dusty dirt roads back into the virgin forests. Although the summers were extremely warm, the large trees arched over the road forming a canopy that shielded us from the direct rays of the sun. There were no "shock-absorbers" on the buggy, so we jounced and bumped along and although delighted with the rides, we were thankful when we arrived back at the house. We just wanted to stand on terra firma and allow our bones to settle back in place.

However, one part of the ride took us over a covered bridge. As a child, the darkened structure, the horses clippety clopping on the rough wooden deck, the sound of unseen rushing water and the anticipation of exiting at the other end, fascinated me. Over the years, I have been captivated by the many different models of covered bridges I've ridden through or have seen from afar. The History of these

bridges is both interesting and sometimes amusing.

People ask why American bridges were all built of wood forgetting that most everything was made of wood over 100 years ago. Many of the early bridges were anything but beautiful. The first bridges were nothing more than "corduroy" in construction, just logs placed across two supporting timbers on each side. As more and more bridges were built, man's skill and ingenuity erected sides on them. Later each side was boxed in with a roof slanted away from the roadway for drainage to preserve the supporting timbers from the elements of storms. This was named the Box Bridge. It is easy to see how this boxing suggested a complete housing and an eventual covered bridge. The weather's intensity also exerted influence on the roof design. The farther north one traveled the steeper the roof became to facilitate the snow removal in winter.

If they were anything but beautiful, it must be remembered that their charm lay first in their individuality as a symbol of the era in which they were built and secondly in their ability to become part of the setting and rooted in the country side. John Ruskin said: "One cannot love art better than to love what it reflects."

The first American patent for a covered bridge was issued 1/21/1797 to Charles W. Peale, the famed painter of George Washington. However, eight years later, Timothy Palmer built a bridge on the site previously selected by Peale but Peal's bridge never got beyond the planning stage. Men in their own communities built bridges to boast of their craftsmanship rather than their engineering knowledge. As bridges having longer spans were planned, trusses to strengthen them were developed.

They became very artistic and complicated to build and the planners resorted to borrowing the ancient designers ideas i.e. architect Andrea Palladio.

Symbolic designs represented the expanding desire to build a very distinctive bridge in some communities like the “street car” bridge in Hardwick, Vt. the “boat-like” bridge at Valley Forge Pa. the “ferry boat” bridge at Newton Falls, Ohio and the “top hat” bridge at No. Wilkesboro, North Carolina.

The romance of covered bridge names is rich in anecdote, much of which has been forgotten. A tobacco company designed a picture of a covered bridge for their cigarette carton, followed by publicity and a song called “The Kissing Bridge”. The one and only named “Kissing Bridge” was located at a point in New York City where 52nd Street and 2nd Avenue intersect. To this day, people who are not acquainted with the country’s covered bridges and think they all look alike anyway, cannot refrain from remarking about any covered bridge, saying: “Look, there is a Kissing Bridge”. However, all covered bridges are kissing bridges in a sense that one was entitled to kiss his girl when traveling through one and if a “wish” was made while on the way through, it was supposed to come true.

A covered bridge seldom remained nameless. Sometimes, a bridge built near a town would take on the name of the town. On the other hand, a town would start to build up around the bridge and the town would be named after the bridge. One Ohio bridge was known as “Old Meaney’s Bridge” because of the irritable toll collector. Another bridge was called “Old Maid Parker Bridge” in Rutland, Vt. , after a caustic old maiden who owned the land on one side of the bridge. In Indiana, another bridge had fine broad side boards that kept disappearing. When it was found that the

boards were being stolen and used for wall – papering boards, the bridge was known as “Papering Board Bridge”

It is a sad fact of life that covered bridges are rapidly disappearing. Some bridges are still used but many are hidden and crumbling just beyond sight of the new highway and concrete bridges that have replaced them. Most people think of the covered bridge as existing only in New England and Vermont in particular. Surprise! the fact is that Vermont is rated fifth down the list of States having covered bridges. It is preceded by Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Oregon.

Most of the remaining bridges are posted with signs giving the maximum amount of weight allowed to cross the span. Heavily laden trucks are endangering the last of the wooden bridges. Modern progress, in the form of school buses, are also dangerous. The last covered bridge standing in the province of Ontario at West Montrose is posted for only 2 tons which was plenty for the loads of hay it was designed for. But the local school bus itself weighs that much. So, twice a day, the bus unloads its human cargo, crosses the bridge and waits for the school children to troop across by foot and reload. If this bridge has disappeared in the mist of time since the last bridge census, the children will miss the daily experience that their parents will cherish forever in their memories.

But I will still have a picture to gaze at and recall those tranquil yesteryears.

Speaking of pictures, thanks to the internet, I was able to find some period pictures of three “Style” bridges.



Hardwick ,Vermont
“Street Car Style”



Valley Forge, Pennsylvania
“Boat Style”



Ogunquit, Maine no covered bridge- Ed.



Newton Falls, Ohio
“Ferry Boat Style”

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