

NEW YORK
archives

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From Potato Farm
to Suburban Dream

Welch's Grape Juice, Not Wine

Canal Vandalism

As Economic Development

Politicians Spill Blood
on Albany Streets

After the Gangster Barbecue



NEW YORK archives

THE NEW YORK STATE ARCHIVES

The New York State Archives reaches every community in New York—saving community heritage, improving citizen access to important records, and enriching education and lifelong learning. A program of the State Education Department, the Archives preserves and makes accessible the essential recorded evidence, past and present, of New York's governments, organizations, peoples, and events. It joins thousands of governments and cultural organizations engaged in this enterprise.

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ON THE FRONT COVER

*Donna Johs on her tricycle in
Levittown, New York, c. 1950.*

FRED AND DOROTHY JOHS

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from the state archivist



ANTHONY MATRAZZO III

Each issue, we receive compliments from readers of *New York Archives* about the quality and readability of the magazine. The praise is well deserved. It reflects the hard work put in by our own staff, as well as by volunteer historians who serve on our editorial advisory board. The compliments also reflect the fact that the magazine is making great strides in promoting history to a non-academic audience.

Since *New York Archives'* founding more than six years ago, it has been recognized with nine awards. Yet the magazine is not the only great communications accomplishment within the State Archives and the Archives Partnership Trust. In the past month, our two organizations have been honored three times for excellence in programming. First came an award from the American Association of Museums for the Archives' new brochure (funded by the Archives Partnership Trust), which explains to visitors the Archives' holdings and how they provide great benefit to the people of New York and others interested in the Empire State's transformational history.

Several weeks later, the brochure was again recognized with a second-place award from the National Association of Government Communicators. A second communications project, a video about the work of the Archives, received top honors in this same competition. I would like to acknowledge Kris Fitzgerald from 2k Design (who is also the designer of this magazine) for her outstanding work on the brochure; New York Network for production of the video; and the staffs of the Archives' Public Programs and Outreach Office and the Partnership Trust for their work that was so integral to the completion of these award-winning projects. Because of all these people, the Archives is even better prepared to inform others of the need to preserve New York's documentary heritage.

The concept of striving for excellence is essential to our purpose. Yet we not only strive to achieve it for ourselves; we have built our mission on the recognition of excellence in others. Within the past several months, we have reviewed grants from New York's local governments and historical records repositories, considered applications from researchers nationwide for our Hackman Research Residency Program, and shortly will consider nominations for our annual Student Research Awards. These awards highlight the best in archives and records programs around the state and encourage the creative use of New York's historical records by scholars and students. We are proud to make these awards available, and prouder still of those who have competed and won. Bringing New York's history to the public is one of the most important things that we do, and all of these awards contribute to our collective success.

Sincerely,

CHRISTINE W. WARD

*New York State Archivist and
Chief Executive Officer of the Archives Partnership Trust*

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is a not-for-profit organization.
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on a regular basis, please join the
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BARBAGALLO

FEATURES

Tricia A. Barbagallo is a doctoral candidate at the University at Albany. Her dissertation, *The Birth of Culture: Indigence, Adversity, and the Law in Early Albany*, uses social history, local and family history, and public policy to define the meaning of poverty in colonial Albany. She is also a New York State Museum Dissertation Research Fellow and a senior research associate at the Colonial Albany Social History Project. She is working on a biography of New York State politician John Taylor.



BEAN

Philip A. Bean serves as dean of academic affairs at Haverford College. He has held teaching positions at Utica College of Syracuse University, Hamilton College, and Harvard University, and earned degrees from Union College, Oxford University, and the University of Rochester. In 2006, he received a Larry J. Hackman Research Residency Award to do research at the New York State Archives.



DOYLE

Michael Doyle is a reporter in the Washington bureau of McClatchy Newspapers, writing for both the *Fresno* and the *Sacramento Bee*. He is also an adjunct journalism instructor at George Washington University and author of *The Forestport Breaks: A Nineteenth-Century Conspiracy Along the Black River Canal* (Syracuse University Press, 2004). He earned a master of studies in law from Yale Law School, where he was a Knight Journalism Fellow.

Michelle Henry has served as Chautauqua County's records management coordinator and county historian since 2000. She earned certification as a New York State Historian in 2005. She holds a master's degree in anthropology and a graduate certificate in museum studies from Arizona State University.



HENRY

Joshua Ruff is history curator at The Long Island Museum and teaches history at St. Joseph's College in Patchogue. A native of upstate New York, he did his graduate work at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He has published articles on a variety of topics, most recently a chapter in *Re-Creating the American Past: Essays on the Colonial Revival* (University of Virginia Press, 2006).



RUFF

DEPARTMENTS

Meldon J. Wolfgang III ("Genealogy") is a professional genealogist based in Nassau, New York. **Robert W. Arnold III** ("Archives Around New York"), **James D. Folts** ("In Their Own Words"), and **Bonita L. Weddle** ("At the State Archives") are staff members of the New York State Archives. **Robert E. Bullock** ("At the Archives Partnership Trust") is president of the Trust.

Letters to the Editor

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number. Write to us at

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Suite 9C49, Cultural Education

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Letters may be edited

for length and/or clarity.

To the Editor:

Working as a railroad officer, my after-hours relaxation is the study of past and present railroads. So I was pleased to read "The Emigrant Train" by Michelle Henry and Pamela A. Brown in the Winter 2007 issue. There were, however, at least three items that need correction:

1) The photograph on page 16 is a gem—it is of the noon train to Jersey City ready to leave the Erie Railway's Market Street Station in Paterson, New Jersey.

2) The photograph on page 20 is captioned "The handwriting on the back of this photograph describes this as the first train to travel over the Erie and Central New York Railroad." There has not, to my knowledge, been any photograph yet found and published of the "first train" over the NY&E on May 15, 1851. The photograph is simply of a train on the Erie & Central New York Railway, a small railroad built c. 1897 that ran nineteen miles from Cortland to Cincinnatus, New York. The picture was taken at Cortland Junction, New York. The locomotive and trailing car are clearly standard gauge (the original NY&E was a six-foot-gauge railroad). The locomotive's technology was not developed until fifteen or twenty years after the NY&E was opened through to Dunkirk.

3) The authors' last sentence, "Despite its best hopes for prosperity, neither the county nor its immigrants ultimately benefited from the New York and Erie Railroad and its 'Emigrant Train'," errs by implying that the Southern Tier and Dunkirk were not important to the NY&E. It's the other way around: the NY&E and its successors were the principal reason for the development of the Southern Tier. Dunkirk's role as the major city in New York west of Buffalo, and as the railroad's western terminus, is a result of its fortuitous lake harbor—a location that ultimately attracted six railroads. Besides transporting thousands of passengers and hundreds of thousands of tons of freight, most of which passed through Dunkirk uneventfully, the NY&E established a principal locomotive shop at Dunkirk that evolved into the Brooks Locomotive Works, an employer of thousands of residents until its final closure in 1962. The NY&E brought swift, safe transportation and excellent employment to the community. Chautauqua County's unpaid debt for immigrant paupers, over \$5,000, was paid to the county countless times over in NY&E railroad taxes, railroad and related wages, and railroad expenditures in the community.

I hope that future issues of *New York Archives* will cover railroad topics with more attention to detail and appreciation of the positive role of railroads in New York State. It's a great story.

Michael J. Connor

*Vice President, Operations and Maintenance
Western New York & Pennsylvania Railroad*

Historian

BY ROBERT E. BULLOCK

On April 24, a capacity crowd of more than 1,000 gathered in Albany to applaud the Archives Partnership Trust's presentation of the 2007 Empire State Archives and History Award to historian Doris Kearns Goodwin for her tireless efforts to promote the importance of history in our society. The program included a public conversation between Ms. Goodwin, a Pulitzer Prize winner, and prominent Lincoln scholar Harold Holzer about her life, her work, and her passion for history. Mr. Holzer, who also served as moderator for the two previous award programs, is a member of the Archives Partnership Trust board and the individual responsible for the success of many of the Trust's public programs.

Ms. Goodwin received her Ph.D. in government from Harvard University and was a Woodrow Wilson Fellow. A professor of history and government known for her courses on the American presidency, her career experience has included service as assistant to President Lyndon Johnson during his last year in the White House and collaboration with him on the preparation of his memoirs.

Her award-winning writings include some of the most important books on history published in our time, on subjects ranging from Abraham

Doris Kearns Goodwin Honored

Lincoln, Lyndon Johnson, Franklin D. and Eleanor Roosevelt (the book that won the Pulitzer Prize), and the Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys, to the Brooklyn Dodgers. An NBC News analyst on politics and government, Ms. Goodwin has served as a consultant and on-air expert for PBS documentaries on LBJ, the Kennedy family, and Franklin Roosevelt, and for Ken Burns's "The History of Baseball."

of C-SPAN's CEO and founder Brian Lamb and of actor Sam Waterston for their efforts to support history as non-historians, the Trust has endeavored to demonstrate that history is central to everything we do, and that its use is frequently fostered by people not traditionally associated with the



Above: Ms. Goodwin watches State Archives Conservation Technician Kenneth Bartowski repair a damaged document.

Left: Harold Holzer shares a laugh with Doris Kearns Goodwin before a sold-out crowd in Albany.



This is the third consecutive year that the Archives Partnership Trust has honored an outstanding individual with the Empire State Archives and History Award. Christine Ward, New York State Archivist and Chief Executive Officer of the Archives Partnership Trust, said, "Through our recognition

field. This year's selection of Doris Kearns Goodwin gives us a different opportunity to pay tribute to one of America's leading historians...and honors Ms. Goodwin for her transformational role in helping to promote understanding of this nation's past."

Sponsors for the event

were Time Warner Cable and The History Channel. Supporting sponsors were 2k Design; 74 State; Benchmark Printing, Inc.; Berkshire Bank; Einhorn Yaffee Prescott Architecture and Engineering P.C.; The Egg; Janney Montgomery Scott LLC; Key Private Bank; MVP Gold; New York State United Teachers; Paul Newman; Attorney Ed Ryan and Diane Deveines Ryan, M.D.; Sawchuk Brown Associates; Starfire Systems; Albany *Times Union*; WAMC Northeast Public Radio; Whiteman Osterman & Hanna LLP Attorneys at Law; and Wojeski & Co., CPA P.C. ■

Bounty Hunting in New York

BY ROBERT W. ARNOLD III

New York's settlers regarded wild animals as either food or foe and exterminated them at an appalling rate. Food animals such as passenger pigeons were slaughtered with no real idea that they could vanish entirely; the world's last passenger pigeon died in a zoo in 1914. The extermination of other species, however, particularly alpha predators such as panthers, bears, and wolves, was assisted by the payment of bounties.

From colonial times until

(a.k.a. panther or mountain lion) got most of the bad press. Minutes of the Ulster County Board of Supervisors indicate that the county paid bounties on 232 wolves between 1711 and 1731. A bounty was also paid on whelps, the young of wolves. As late as 1793, the board of supervisors paid a bounty on a panther. At the other end of the pest chain was the squirrel. In 1793, "the Freeholders and Inhabitants of the Town of Rensselaerville [Albany County] Resolved unanimously that one penny

County, a certificate was issued for a full-grown wolf that was later determined to have been caught as a whelp, raised until fully grown, and then killed in order to collect the twice-larger bounty paid for adult animals.

Physical evidence of a kill had to be presented, and to receive payment hunters had to swear that these animals had been killed within town limits. When a squirrel scalp was submitted, for example, the appropriate town officer immediately clipped off its ears and burned them so that the same scalp could not be submitted again by ethically challenged citizens. A certificate was then signed, and the town supervisors, who collectively formed the county's board of supervisors, paid the bounties from town funds, to be

reimbursed by the county. However, sometimes the rules got broken. In Essex County rattlesnakes were a threat, and a higher bounty was paid for them than in neighboring Warren County, leading to the occasional bounty-jumper crossing the county line to collect. Rattlesnakes also regenerate their rattles, so enterprising citizens would keep snakes alive, repeatedly trim off the rattles, and submit them for payment.

As post-Revolutionary New York was settled, bounty payments were expanded to

Financial incentives to hunt and destroy these animals did not in the long run prove effective, and may have done considerable environmental harm.

within modern memory, many New York communities paid bounties on "pest animals" killed for public benefit.

Where the state was sparsely populated and agricultural, such animals were viewed as predators that took domestic animals, ravaged crops, or made life dangerous for settlers, and were therefore impediments to survival. But financial incentives to hunt and destroy these animals did not in the long run prove effective, and may have done considerable environmental harm.

The wolf and the cougar

be allowed for every Squirrel's Scalp, of any Squirrel kind which shall be killed... ."

Honest bounty hunting could be lucrative, at least when taking alpha predators like cougars. In Chenango County in 1802, Daniel Buck paid for his farm with bounty money: \$60 for each wolf and \$75 for each panther. In a single year, Buck killed eleven panthers at a time when land in New York State sold for two dollars an acre. However, in a cash-scarce rural economy, bounty money raised temptation: in 1820 in Chautauqua

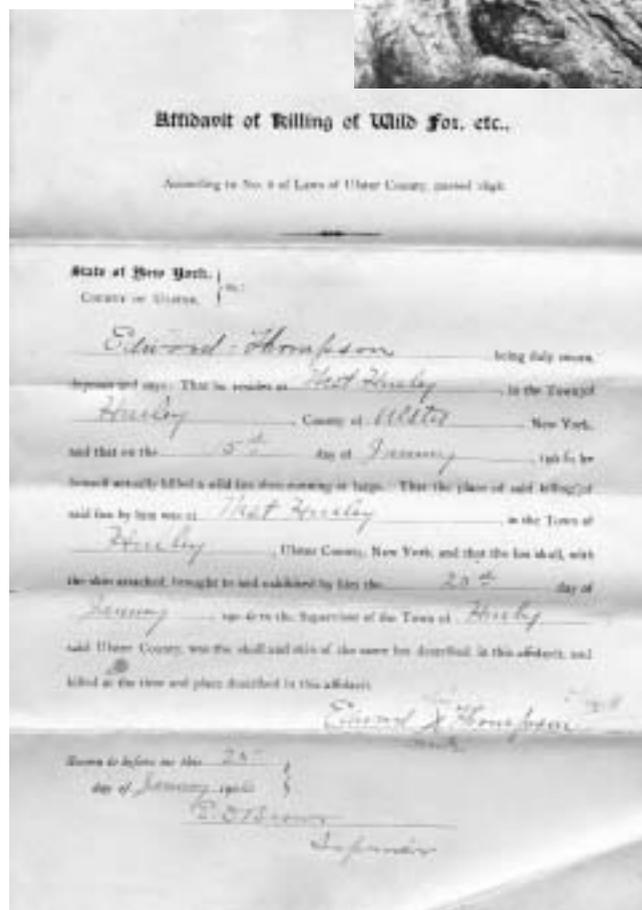
include hawks, wildcats, foxes, crows, rats, lynx, blackbirds, and probably other animals. Clinton County was still paying wolf bounties in the early



APRIL/DACK MUSEUM

Left: Bears were hunted for bounty because they occasionally destroyed crops and property.

Below: In 1906, Edward Thompson turned in a fox skull with skin attached to claim his bounty from Ulster County.



NEW YORK STATE ARCHIVES

1820s, and Montgomery County's Board of Supervisors resolved to "allow the sum of fifteen dollars for every full grown wolf killed in this county and the sum of seven dollars and fifty cents for any wolf whelp killed within the same." As settlers pushed into western

New York, Chautauqua County wolves in 1815 "were as plenty [sic] as black-berries in harvest." At that time, wool was a lucrative farm product that provided uniforms for the armies of the Napoleonic Wars, and sheep farming increased in response to this demand.

Wolves were a threat to the valuable sheep, so the county increased its appropriation for wolf bounties, but by 1820 the county supervisors petitioned the state to have the bounty reduced because there were so few wolves left. The last wolf was killed there in 1841.

In more modern times, the bounty on a rattlesnake in Essex County during the Depression was one dollar; on a hawk, half that. This was money much-needed by locals, some of whom evidently became at least part-time bounty hunters. In November 1935, the county paid bounties on thirty-five rattlesnakes and seventeen hawks. The warm months, when the snakes were on the move, proved the most lucrative. In mid-August of 1930, H.M. Lawrence was paid for thirty-seven rattlesnake rattles, and Francis Kelly was paid for eighteen rattles in September 1939, although most bounty payouts recorded in the Essex County Clerk's Office were for one to three animals. While men were usually collectors of bounties, in 1933 one Lavina Lewis was

paid for two hawks.

Since 1983, the timber rattler has been a threatened species—not entirely due to bounty hunting, but certainly not helped by it. However, some species are no longer threatened by bounty hunting but by the dynamics of development. The eastern timber wolf now inhabits only three percent of its former U.S. range. Except for Florida, since 1900 the cougar has largely been eliminated east of the Mississippi River. Hawks and other raptors were threatened by the pesticide DDT, but since its ban these populations have been recovering and are now fairly common. Squirrels have adapted readily to urban and suburban life and remain pest animals that live bounty-free.

As times changed, so did the outlook on the environment and the appreciation of the ecological roles of various species. Bounties were outlawed in New York State in the early 1970s, and efforts have been made—sometimes hotly opposed in public debate—to re-establish populations of some formerly bounty-hunted predators. Today, research and sensitivities look upon pest animals as occupants of important environmental niches, or as helpful predators that eliminate true pests such as rats and mice, or simply as prey themselves in the natural food chain. ■

Crawling the State

BY BONITA L. WEDDLE

When Governor Pataki announced in July 2005 that he would not seek a fourth term of office, the State Archives and the State Library recognized that state government websites would change dramatically in early 2007. The state's main site, www.ny.gov, and many state agency sites would be altered to reflect the new administration's goals and priorities, and at least some information documenting Governor Pataki's programs and policies would likely be lost.

The Archives and the Library decided to preserve this information by conducting a "web crawl," designed to capture and preserve publicly accessible state government sites as they existed in December 2006. Working with the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), a consortium that provides a variety of services to archives and libraries throughout North America, Archives and Library staff used



Today's archival records include websites, as well as the more familiar paper documents.

a "web crawler"—a specialized software program that copies all files found on a given website and preserves all internal hyperlinks—to capture the information found on these sites. During the last two weeks of December 2006, two Archives staffers directed the crawler to each site slated for capture, monitored the program's progress, and verified that the top-level pages of each site were captured properly. Throughout January 2007, they prepared the files for long-term storage and preservation.

The crawler successfully copied over 250 sites that totaled fifty gigabytes of data. Some of these sites have already undergone dramatic change. For example, thousands of speeches, position papers, press releases, and other documents and photographs created by Governor Pataki and his staff that were

mounted on the www.ny.gov site were removed from there during the gubernatorial transition. The outgoing governor's office placed these files on disk in late December and transferred them to the State Archives in early January, but the Archives and Library's crawl of the site provides additional insurance that future users will be able to access and navigate the site as it existed in late December.

At present, staffers are conducting an intensive review of the crawl results, creating user guides and other tools that will help users locate the information they seek, and determining how frequently future crawls should be conducted. The Archives and the Library anticipate that the results of the December 2006 crawl will be accessible to the public in summer 2007. ■



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Suburban life, 1950s.



CORBIS

Salesman OF THE American Dream

BY JOSHUA RUFF

The G.I.s who returned from World War II wanted only a few things: to get married, have kids, and settle down. Bill Levitt, creator of Levittown, made a fortune by building the houses that allowed them to do just that.

“Can the housing industry produce more houses and better houses, cheaper?” That was the question put to the nation’s leading house builders at the Westchester Country Club on a spring day in 1948. America was coming out of a housing shortage so acute that some World War II veterans had converted chicken coops, trolley cars, and even automobiles into living spaces. William Levitt (1907–1994),

builder of Levittown, Long Island, was clearly “the most aggressive member” of the panel assembled that day. “He feels that he has started a revolution,” *Life* magazine reported.

Levitt was always quick to take credit for changing the housing industry. In a 1952 televised segment of “Industry on Parade,” the narrator put it this way: “The idea that came to...Bill Levitt was this:

...why not mass produce the elements that go to make up a new house, just as the auto industry does with the parts that go into a new car?”

Levitt has often been described as the “Henry Ford of housing.” Like Ford, he did not invent production-line techniques for his industry. But along with his brother, Alfred, he did perfect them into a seamless set of tasks that made the complicated



Abraham Levitt (center) with his sons Bill (left) and Alfred.

“For Sale: A New Way of Life” is the way Time Magazine described the feature on Bill Levitt.



Levitt did not invent production-line techniques for his industry. But along with his brother, Alfred, he did perfect them into a seamless set of tasks that made the complicated process of building a house textbook-efficient.

process of building a house textbook-efficient. “One built every sixteen minutes,” the ads insisted. And Bill—a man *Time Magazine* called a “cocky, rambunctious hustler”—skillfully sold those houses, becoming the most famous American builder of his time.

Levitt’s story is also reminiscent of a Greek tragedy: great rise, great hubris, great fall. “His ego made him, his ego broke him, and his ego kept him alive,” says his widow, Simone Levitt. From the heights of the 1940s and 50s, Levitt eventually made a series of financial miscalculations that would cost

him his fortune.

Criticized by civil rights activists, community planners, and critics of the new suburban “ticky tacky” sweeping the nation, Levitt was also praised by legions of homeowners who saw him as a dream broker. “God bless Mommy and Daddy and Mister Levitt,” went the bedtime prayer of one youngster in Levittown, according to Bill Levitt himself. This may have been no exaggeration: even today, he is revered throughout the community that bears his name.

Building Mania

Levitt’s father, Abraham, a lawyer and rabbi’s son from the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, began the family’s real estate business. He formed Levitt & Sons, Inc. during the summer before the crash of 1929. The company first sold upscale homes in their “Strathmore” developments in Rockville Centre (and later, Manhasset). “Strathmores” gave classy polish to a nouveau-riche clientele that craved it. Bill, a twenty-two-year-old

NYU dropout who wanted “a big car and a lot of clothes,” had a natural ability for sales. Alfred, just eighteen at the time, designed the houses.

While other builders struggled during the Depression, the Levitts continued to thrive by targeting upper-middle-class professionals less hurt by it. Their Rockville Centre homes were priced at \$14,500, while Manhasset-area homes went from \$9,100 to \$18,000. Bill Levitt obtained mortgage money even as banks across the New York metropolitan area were closing during the dreaded Bank Holiday of 1933. In the meantime, he built the firm’s first advertising connections.

One element of his marketing genius was skillful cross-pollination. A 1937 ad for Fenestra steel window screens, graced by an illustration of one of Levitt & Sons’ palatial Tudor homes, used a testimonial from Bill: “We have built 118 homes in the new Strathmore-at-Manhasset... the public buys these homes just as fast as they can be



Aerial view of Levittown, 1948.



Typical of the beautiful homes in Strathmore at Manhasset

THE easy way Fenestra Steel Casements open and close in conjunction with Fenestra Screens is one of the talked-about features of our homes in Strathmore-at-Manhasset," says William J. Levitt of Levitt & Sons.

"We have built 118 homes in the new Strathmore-at-Manhasset. Many of them are Colonials—every one is Fenestra equipped. The public buys these homes just as fast as they can be completed."

Outstanding among successful home builders in America, Levitt & Sons have standardized on nationally known products with instant home owner appeal.

Fenestra

Detroit Steel Products Company
650 Graybar Building • New York City

completed." Of course, the ad was selling not just Fenestra screens but also Levitt & Sons. Cooperative advertising quickly became a hallmark of the Levitts' success, and appliance and hardware companies lined up for product endorsements by both Bill and Alfred.

In 1941, Bill enlisted in the Navy and became a lieutenant in the Seabees. His experiences during World War II were instructive. He later claimed to have seen the future through the men who served under him in Hawaii. When asked about their plans after the war, their response, he said, was invariably to get married, have kids, and settle down. Levitt knew they'd need a place to live at a price they could afford.

Houses from Potato Fields

In fact, the Levitts kept busy during wartime, honing their mass-production techniques at a Navy housing project near Norfolk, Virginia. The new Federal Housing Administration gave money to developers to

build new homes that veterans could then purchase with financial aid from their G.I. Bill benefits. It was in this climate that Levitt & Sons broke ground in 1947 on their first mass-produced housing community, Island Trees (later renamed Levittown), built on former potato farmland.

Their pace of building over 17,000 houses in just four years was breakneck—and they learned as they went. Above all, they cut out the middleman: when lumber couldn't be gotten fast enough, they purchased an entire forest in California. To pound all that wood into place, a factory in Belgium turned out their nails. Hundreds of non-union workers were hired to do piecemeal at high wages. Edward Konop, a construction superintendent who worked for Bill Levitt for seven years, remembers him as being "very good to his employees and very hands on...I saw Bill at the job site more than anybody."

The community was finished in phases, with simple Cape Cods constructed the

first year and ranch houses introduced each successive year. The appliances with which these homes were outfitted, from Bendix washing machines to General Electric refrigerators, were a godsend to new residents.

Levittown homeowner Helen Hooper fit the typical profile: young, recently married, the wife of a Navy veteran from Queens. Even today, she credits Bill Levitt for "giving us everything we never had." Applying to purchase her new home, Hooper was one of the many "crazies" who waited

Cooperative advertising promoted both a window screen manufacturer and Levitt-built homes.



COURTESY SIMONE LEVITT

From left: Senator Jacob Javits, Bill and Simone Levitt, Marion Javits, 1970.

*The Levitts' mansion
"La Colline" on Long Island's North Shore.*

By the late 1980s, the great builder had lost most of his fortune but none of his pride in his most famous accomplishment.

in line all weekend to be near the front of the line on Monday morning: "We slept in the car...and then they took us to a big room...And there were desks and typewriters and people all interviewing us. We had to have a hundred dollar deposit...we moved in September '49 and we were there for forty-six years."

Others were not so fortunate. Levitt denied African Americans the opportunity to buy his houses. The Levitts were among many builders with such policies, but white flight was part of their own family history: they had fled Brooklyn in the 1920s after the arrival in their neighborhood of a black assistant district attorney and his family. Black veterans were repeatedly turned away from Levittown,

and although the racial bar was rescinded by 1955, the community remains less than one percent black to this day.

Still, Levittown was the start of better things for many new homeowners. The houses were adaptable, and soon everyone was jumping into home improvements: putting in bedrooms in the expandable upstairs attic, adding bay windows onto the front façade. By the mid-1950s, many were cashing in on their newfound equity and moving into larger homes in other communities. And like some of their customers, the Levitts too were moving on.

The Good Life

In 1954, after much squabbling, Bill and Alfred split the business. While Alfred turned to Queens apartment complexes, Bill continued to cut a very public figure as president of Levitt & Sons. By the mid-1950s, he had hired John Reagan "Tex" McCrary, Jr., the legendary public relations specialist who helped orchestrate the 1959 Nixon-

Khrushchev "Kitchen Debate" and whose clients included Chris-Craft, Learjet, and the government of Argentina. But Bill worked hard on marketing. Every Sunday after breakfast, he went straight to his study to write ad copy that would sell houses in the following Sunday's newspapers.

His business reach soon expanded to Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, and even France—Chez Levitt, some forty miles southeast of Paris on the Seine, was a project for which he would win the Légion d'honneur. He became friends with prominent men in New York society like Senator Jacob Javits, who often swam laps at Levitt's palatial "La Colline" in Mill Neck on Long Island's North Shore. A thirty-room mansion on sixty-eight acres, Bill's home was just eleven miles north of the community that had made him famous—but light-years away from Levittown's early 750-square-foot floor plans.

Levitt collected artwork and filled his walls with

THE ARCHIVES CONNECTION

Research for this article was based on the museum exhibition *Living the American Dream: Levittown and the Suburban Boom*, on view at The Long Island Museum in Stony Brook, New York through July 8, 2007. Unfortunately, most of the business records of Levitt & Sons, Inc. were lost or purged many years ago. But the Levittown Public Library has a large collection of photographs, newspaper and magazine clippings, maps, architectural drawings and elevations, and documents such as deeds and mortgage contracts, about the community. The Levittown Historical Society is the repository of many original artifacts and photographs of Levittown homes. The State University of New York at Stony Brook owns a small file of correspondence between New York Senator Jacob Javits and Bill Levitt, as well as the papers of Julian and Muriel Kane, community leaders who lived in Levittown in the 1950s and 60s. Ultimately the most important and interesting resources for personal insights into the man and his community were oral history interviews with Levitt's family and a small number of long-term residents of Levittown.



COURTESY SIMONE LEVITT



LEVITTOWN PUBLIC LIBRARY

A classic image from 1950s suburbia.

works by Renoir, Monet, and Chagall. In early 1969, this hobby took a romantic turn when he met Simone Korchin, an art dealer. He kept coming back for purchasing visits until he told Korchin, who was still married to her first husband (as he was still married to his second wife), "I have no more wall space. I guess I'll have to marry you." Six months later, he did.

Today, Simone Levitt remembers a man certainly more endearing than the one described in his press clippings. After their marriage, Bill adopted Simone's two daughters and devoted himself to his new family. He also sent her "special delivery love letters" and named his 237-foot yacht, *La Belle Simone*, after her.

Despite his expensive tastes, Levitt's charitable work was considerable. During World War II, he led the local chapter of the United Jewish Appeal for Refugees and Overseas Needs to raise money for persecuted European Jews. After the war, he continued to support Jewish causes with

substantial financial gifts to Israel. He was also instrumental as chairman of the board of North Shore Hospital for many years, establishing the Levitt Diagnostic Center.

Fame, but No Fortune

Riding in an open car at the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of Pennsylvania's Levittown, Simone Levitt remembers feeling "like the First Lady, waving to everyone from the car." But this was actually the beginning of a dark period for the master builder and his wife. In the 1970s, Levitt's fortune and business successes began to slip. His sale of the company to ITT soured when his stock options fell to about ten percent of their original \$92 million value. From the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, newspapers were filled with headlines of his latest ventures gone awry; failed developments in Florida, Nigeria, Iran, and Venezuela followed. A project near Orlando, Florida was particularly painful: hundreds of homes had leaks,

Levitt failed to return deposits to some customers, and he ran into trouble with the New York State Attorney General.

By the late 1980s, the great builder had lost most of his fortune but none of his pride in his most famous accomplishment. He often drove his Lincoln through the streets of Levittown and was greatly touched by an outpouring of love at the parade celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the community in 1987: "You know, the 60,000 people of Levittown are much more my friends than the people of Park Avenue. Oh God, yes, more than most of those I entertained on my yacht."

When he died in 1994, the newspapers swept aside many of the difficulties of Levitt's last years, remembering him as the man who had changed the nation's housing forever. Yet by then, the new suburban world he had helped create—an affordable new way of life for ex-GIs and their families—seemed to be a distant dream. ■



Tempered Vines

BY MICHELLE HENRY

After the Civil War, Thomas Welch, a staunch Methodist and temperance advocate, set out to produce a grape product that would be the “fruit of the vine instead of the cup of the devil”—and built a multi-million-dollar company in the process.

Chautauqua County’s “grape belt” stretches ninety miles along the southern shore of Lake Erie, across the county’s entire northern border. An escarpment created during the last Ice Age rises behind the belt, and with the lake it helps regulate the growing season by delaying spring budding and prolonging moderate temperatures for an autumn harvest.

Grapes have been grown in Chautauqua County since 1818, arriving during the first decade of the county’s formation. They were used to produce wine that was sold locally. In 1849, the Concord grape was developed in Massachusetts and was soon discovered to be a variety that was ideally suited to the climate and soil of Chautauqua County’s unique grape belt.

By 1859, there were twenty acres of Concord grapes in the county; by 1864, there were



Niagara grapes and peaches ready for market, 1911.

over 400. But local farmers struggled to find a larger market for their produce. Attempts to promote the dark purple grape as a table fruit were largely unsuccessful because consumers were unfamiliar with it and confused it with a plum, and the ripe grapes didn’t survive the long trip to major markets in New York and Philadelphia.

Juice, Not Wine

At the same time, in Vineland, New Jersey Dr. Thomas Welch began experimenting with Concord grapes in an attempt to create a sweet, unfermented juice that was shelf-stable. Welch, a staunch Methodist and supporter of temperance, believed that churches should offer the “fruit of the vine instead of the cup of the

devil” for communion. In 1869, Welch successfully bottled a sweet grape juice that did not ferment and began selling “Dr. Welch’s Unfermented Wine” to churches in and around New Jersey. Welch’s son, Charles, a dentist (and teetotaler like his father), took an interest in the juice business, and the two promoted the drink as a health tonic as well as an alternative to standard communion wine.

Charles Welch understood the power of advertising. Welch’s was the only non-alcoholic fruit juice on the market—but in order to make unfermented wine a viable product, he knew he must create a demand for it, educate the public about its qualities, and overcome prejudice against it. In 1893, samples of the juice were distributed at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, and by 1896 the

NEW YORK STATE ARCHIVES

THE ARCHIVES CONNECTION

Sources include the definitive history of the company, *Welch's Grape Juice: From Corporation to Co-Operative* (Syracuse University Press, 1977) by William Chazanof; local history files at the Chautauqua County Historical Society in Westfield; incorporation and Surrogate Court records held by the Chautauqua County Archives; and H.C. Taylor's 1873 *Historical Sketches of the Town of Portland*.



NEW YORK STATE ARCHIVES

Boxes of grapes are delivered to the Welch's Grape Juice plant in Youngstown, New York in 1935.

business had outgrown the Vineland grape supply. So both Thomas and Charles visited several locations in New York State where grapes were grown, including the Village of Westfield, located in the heart of Chautauqua County's grape belt. According to the *Westfield Republican* of July 19, 1922, the village had a great deal to offer in 1897: 3,000 acres of grapes, good water, a Methodist church, a municipal electric plant, rail service, a pretty village, and friendly residents. It also offered to donate a lot near the rail line for the Welches to build a factory, and a local bank offered to help finance the construction.

On April 19, 1897, the Welch's Grape Juice Company was incorporated in Westfield. Thomas and Charles, determined to complete the factory in time for the fall harvest, supervised every aspect of construction and managed to complete the building in three months, installing the pressing equipment as the grapes were ready to be picked. That year,

288 tons of Concord grapes were pressed. By its tenth year in Westfield, the Welch's factory had quadrupled in size and was pressing 4,500 tons of grapes annually.

The Fruits of Advertising

In 1901, Welch's Grape Juice Company sponsored five booths at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, substantially increasing exposure. In 1903, Thomas Welch died and the company was rechartered, making Charles its sole owner. Charles was intimately involved with all facets of the business, as were his four sons. Because of his religious convictions, no part of the business was permitted to operate on Sundays. But he continued to expend a great deal of money on advertising, placing ads in religious, temperance, health, and medical journals, as well as in women's periodicals and national magazines. In 1910 the company spent \$170,000 on advertising and sold \$1 million worth of juice; by 1913, sales had doubled. Around that

time, the company sponsored a national contest to see how many words could be made from the phrase "Welch's Grape Juice," and a top prize of \$10 was awarded to the winner (for 1,366 words).

Welch's Grape Juice Company was a "full-service" company: buyer, processor, seller, employer. Welch's consistently paid more than their competitors for grapes; between 1897 and 1922 it paid growers over \$7 million for their fruit and demanded quality and loyalty from them. But wages for factory and office workers were below the state average. However, interviews with former Welch's employees mention job security and a sense of family that helped the company retain a steady labor force. An annual summer picnic for all employees was held on the Welch estate. The Welch family was also active in the community, supporting their church and serving on the boards of many local organizations.

In 1927, the Lake Erie grape belt stretched over

60,000 acres. But production would gradually decline as yield per acre improved and grape prices dropped. Charles Welch died in 1926, and in 1928 the company was sold to a corporation in Nashville, Tennessee, diminishing the strong sense of family and community involvement. Welch's was sold again in 1945, and then in 1952, this time to the National Grape Co-Operative Association, an organization of grape growers. By 2002, corporate headquarters had completed a move to Concord, Massachusetts, and although a grape processing plant still remains in Westfield, the administrative building built by Charles Welch in 1909 remains empty. But Chautauqua County is still the largest producer of grapes in New York State, with 15,500 acres dedicated to grape production. ■

THE FORESTPORT

BY MICHAEL DOYLE

It was mysterious, the way those Erie Canal levees broke at Forestport at the turn of the century. Then they broke again, and again. Was it truly the end of an era, or was it a conspiracy against the state?

Water rushes through a break in the Forestport Feeder canal levee, 1899.

Darkness fell, and the ruffians gathered like ghosts. Forestport was distracted with its customary frolics on the evening of May 23, 1898. Surrounded by six sawmills, the Erie Canal-side town in upstate New York's upper Oneida County scared the faint of heart. Its bars and pleasuring establishments pulsed with the rowdy river drivers down from the Big Moose River, the wizened and de-fingered sawyers, the canawlers still clinging to their dying trade.

"The citizens are a hardy class of men, honest in the main," the *Brooklyn Eagle* would observe in January 1900, "but having among them... the reckless daredevil class which makes its living away from humanity and modern civilization in general."

Prosecutors would make the Forestport case more bluntly. "They've got more saloons than houses," one law enforcement official would state in May 1900, "and that is the way the town is ruled." True enough: the town of 1,500 souls boasted half a dozen saloons, whose owners pulled the strings. There was

PORT BREAKS

Walt Bynon's place, and big Dick Manahan's Getman House, and Jimmy Rudolph's dangerous pool hall, and the lumberjack's hotel known as Doyle's. Forestport was a town on the edge, where civilization merged with the North Country wilderness.

Remsen was a rather more placid town, twenty minutes away by the New York Central Railroad line. When the detectives from the Pinkerton National Detective Agency started coming, they transited Remsen. But that would be later, after the Forestport canal levees had collapsed once too often and suspicions could no longer be suppressed.

"There is no law," people whispered, "north of Remsen."

How the Deed Was Done

Erie Canal authorities may have grown accustomed to breaks; by the late nineteenth century, the whole system was as dilapidated as an old man with brittle bones. But when the Forestport levees broke in 1897, and again in 1898, and once more in 1899, the coincidence would provoke Governor Roosevelt's team of investigators. What they subsequently found, one prosecutor would thunder in

1900, amounted to "one of the most gigantic conspiracies that was ever concocted in New York State."

On the night of May 23, 1898, four men gathered unnoticed amid Forestport's customary mayhem. They snuck away from River Street and crossed the bridge spanning the Black River, the sounds of saloon revelry subsiding as they walked up a hill toward the Forestport Feeder canal. The Feeder connected Forestport to Boonville and the Black River Canal eleven miles away, but the men were not going that far. Instead, they struck off down the towpath for several hundred yards, lugging picks and shovels and a bottle. Two of them separated to stand watch. The other two, pool hall owner James Rudolph and a local hard case named John Root, took a warming pull of whiskey and readied their tools. "And Root and I," Rudolph would later testify, "went to digging."

"There was a regular hole worked into the bottom of the canal 30 or 40 feet deep, and that was working back towards the berm bank and up and down the canal in both directions," a local man named Charley Pratt would testify in

"They've got more saloons than houses," one law enforcement official would state in May 1900, "and that is the way the town is ruled."

1900. "Dirt was caving into the bottom of the canal and big chunks of earth were dropping into this hole as the water undermined it."

Pratt's testimony was recorded in a trial transcript found at the Oneida County Courthouse, as well as in microfilmed editions of the *Boonville Herald*, *Rome Daily Sentinel*, and *Utica Observer*. In fact, all of the Oneida County newspapers were enraptured by the story of the frequent Forestport breaks that unraveled over the course of several years. By the time a series of criminal trials began in Rome in April 1900, reporters were swarming over the rough-and-tumble town and its ill-fated canal levees.

Walking Through History

It's 108 years later, September 30, 2006. Saloon girls sashay before Scooter's bar, a rugged but warm-hearted place that a newly painted sign identifies as Forestport's old Hotel Doyle. Nickel beers have been poured since ten in the morning, enlivening spirits for the first-ever Old Forestport Days. A parade forms: a mounted posse, buggies, and impeccably restored antique cars depart River Street at a ceremonious pace. The parade crosses the Black River bridge and moves uphill toward the Forestport Feeder. At the garlanded head of the canal towpath, Scooter's co-owner, Jeannie Wolcott, dedicates the newest section of what's called the North Country Scenic Trail, a 4,600-mile braid of trails connecting North Dakota to Lake Champlain.



Whenever the canal levees broke, the state would hire hundreds of workers and spend tens of thousands of dollars on repairs, making Forestport flush—for awhile.

Celebrants stroll down the towpath to the place where, 108 years earlier, John Root, James Rudolph, and their cronies had dug all night. Some clues of physical rupture and reclamation endure, and a sepia-toned image forms in the mind's eye: the diggers slivering away the towpath until the canal water starts sluicing through, carrying chunks of levee downhill toward the Black River. One imagines the wound confronting canal men on the fog-bound morning of May 24, 1898.

I came upon the crime scene by accident.

While researching my family history, I learned that my great-grandfather and namesake, a certain Michael Doyle of Forestport, New York, had owned a saloon and lumberjack's hotel. How colorful, I thought. Growing up in California and working as a newspaper correspondent in Washington, D.C., I knew (and cared) nothing about Forestport—until I began digging too.

Census records at the National Archives, and birth

Men and equipment stand in the bottom of the canal ready to repair the break.





THE ARCHIVES CONNECTION

If archives are a door to the past, those who work with them hold the keys. This is not soon forgotten by anyone approaching New York's imposingly large State Archives, Library, and Museum for the first time. Senior historian Craig Williams cracked open some secrets, finding photographs of the nineteenth-century Forestport and Black River Canals that conveyed the power unleashed by a canal's collapse. These photographs helped illustrate my book.

The men who built and rebuilt the canals filled notebooks with their daily accounts. Beyond the New York State Engineer and Surveyor's annual reports, administrative files contain day-to-day documents that can bore you to tears—or make you jump for joy. Another kind of compiled first-hand reporting held in the Archives includes testimony from 1869 collected by Erie Canal appraisers who investigated the collapse of the North Lake Reservoir, which revealed shoddy practices and political machinations. Records compiled by the Canal Investigating Commission, established in 1898, are even more damning. The commission's correspondence, cost estimates, and interrogations showcase how archival collections bring the past to life.

inspiration for the saloon-keepers and hotel owners of Forestport, who had banded together to hire Jimmy Rudolph's gang. Whenever the canal levees broke, the state would hire hundreds of workers and spend tens of thousands of dollars on repairs, making Forestport flush—for awhile.

"The Forestport men," the Brooklyn *Eagle* declared in January 1900, "did not have the position that enabled them to make the raid on the treasury in a polite and genteel manner, and so they went at it brutally."

And Michael Doyle? He had been in the middle of it all. Pinkerton detectives peeled away the Forestport layers until they understood how—and why—the breaks occurred.

"I would give \$25 if there was another break," Doyle had told Rudolph in the spring of 1898.

Good old great-granddad! He inspired the 1898 plotting, and similar commercial considerations brought about the breaks in 1897 and 1899. Ultimately, thirteen Forestport men were arrested—the first time anyone was charged with conspiring to destroy Erie Canal property. Several went to Auburn State Prison, but Michael Doyle escaped prosecution by dying before the Pinkertons arrived.

But today his place still stands, as Scooter's bar; the Forestport Feeder still flows; and the towpath still beckons, all of them found through digging up the archives this time, a refurbished trail of ghosts and memory. ■

and death records in Oneida County, got me started. Turn-of-the-century county histories fleshed out names and faces. At the State Library in Albany, annual reports from the New York State Engineer and Surveyor recorded the Erie Canal's rise and fall. Canal depredations proved to be well documented; the Archives' shelves were thick with reports from canal investigating commissions established in 1846, 1876, and 1898. "If the state's waterways are used as means of favoritism, bad appointments, corrupt contracts or extravagance and mismanagement to promote partisan ends at the expense of public service...there ought to be exposure," the *New York Times* reasoned in September 1890.

The Forestport breaks had been sketchily described in works like Noble E. Whitford's 1906 opus *History of the Canal System of the State of New York*, but the breaks were never explored in depth. So that's what I set out to do when I began the research that led to my book, *The Forestport Breaks: A Nineteenth-Century Conspiracy Along the Black River Canal*, published by Syracuse University Press in 2004.

For Money—and Memory

I learned that for decades, well-connected men had plundered the Erie Canal. Businessmen had soaked it with costly contracts, politicians had padded it with patronage jobs, and it had provided dark



“Fellow Citizens, Re



BY TRICIA A. BARBAGALLO

During the nineteenth century, politicians practiced an unwritten Code of Honor to establish morals, civility, and respectful professional behavior. But men in Albany broke the Code when a political argument escalated into violence—in the middle of a downtown street.

It was Tuesday, April 21, 1807 in the City of Albany, a busy but ordinary spring morning. The Hudson River had just become navigable after being closed for the winter due to ice jams, and boats from New York were lined up along the quay to unload goods. Residents were bustling around preparing for Pinkster, a festival celebrated by slaves and free blacks. Shoppers clattered along newly bricked sidewalks and children dodged wagons as they played hoops in the street. But that peaceful day turned absolutely chaotic after high-ranking state officials assaulted each other in the middle of State Street. The incident was reported in many state newspapers under headlines such as “Fellow Citizens, Read a Horrid Tale...” and “Fracas at Albany!”

The affray is important because it documents the behavior of politicians. Often they were emotional about their political beliefs; all were

devoted to protecting their reputations. But when their peers and family became targets of public humiliation, sometimes they reacted instinctively. So public officials of the time abided by an unwritten Code of Honor, a set of rules by which they agreed to treat each other with loyalty, friendship, and respect. Rules for dueling were published, and only certain pistols were used. Hitting a rival with a cane had restrictions, swearing was limited to private sessions, and only certain words were considered acceptable.

But the Code of Honor was broken in Albany that April day.

Seeds of Anger

Many issues sparked the Albany fight, including bipartisan politics and differences over interpretation of the U.S. Constitution. At the time, there were two major political parties in the state, the Federalists (now the Republican Party) and the Democratic-

and a Horrid Tale...”



Hitting a rival with a cane had restrictions, swearing was limited to private sessions, and only certain words were considered acceptable.

Republicans. Elections took place in late April, making it an important month for campaigning. Because newspapers were the primary means of communication, each party had a specific newspaper they used to promote candidates. The parties had committees that organized political meetings, which were held in taverns such as Albany's Tontine Coffee-House or City Tavern.

In 1807, the Federalists met to endorse Governor Morgan

Lewis, who was running for re-election. The Democratic-Republican gubernatorial candidate was Daniel Tompkins. In mid-April, both parties convened to establish their positions on a bill that would allow Irish prisoners to immigrate into the state. The Federalists did not support this legislation because they felt the Irish would cause public problems. The Democratic-Republicans, however, supported immigration based on the advice of New York's attorney general, who stated that denying the Irish entry was unconstitutional. They also noted that the Irish were not all criminals, and that many were jailed for debt, not crime. Republicans who endorsed the immigration bill were Senator John Tayler and comptroller and lobbyist Elisha Jenkins, both influential politicians. Their Federalist opponents and rivals were Solomon VanRensselaer, the adjutant general, and Cornelius Schemerhorn, a

military officer and Van Rensselaer's son-in-law.

However, both parties were factioned, which threatened the outcome of the impending election. This forced each party to try to sway politicians to vote against their own party. Federalist VanRensselaer, for example, tried to coax Republicans to vote against Tompkins and for Lewis. VanRensselaer visited Republican Assemblyman Nicholas Staats and tried to coerce a vote from him in exchange for a promotion, but Staats reported the visit to Citizen Edmund Genêt, a Democratic-Republican and former French emissary to the U.S., and to Tayler and Jenkins. As a tactic to disgrace the Federalists, Genet published a news article exposing VanRensselaer's actions. Jenkins proclaimed VanRensselaer a dishonest and corrupt politician, and also published news articles incriminating him.

Politics in 1807 set off a chain of events that left the state's adjutant general near death. The cast of characters included (from left): Morgan Lewis, Daniel Tompkins, Elisha Jenkins, Solomon VanRensselaer, John Tayler, and Francis Bloodgood.

CREDITS (FROM LEFT):

VanRensselaer, still angry, followed Jenkins down State Street. Using his walking stick, he caned Jenkins twice in the head. After Jenkins fell face-down, VanRensselaer “put his foot on his neck and struck his backsides.”

Fracas in the Street

VanRensselaer claimed he suffered injury and public scrutiny at the hand of Jenkins and had consequently lost respect and approval from colleagues. He tried to repair his image by publishing his own account of the meeting with Staats, in which he denied bribing him. But on April 21, VanRensselaer, still angry, followed Jenkins down State Street. Using his walking stick, he caned Jenkins twice in the head. After Jenkins fell face-down, VanRensselaer “put his foot on his neck and struck his backsides.”

News of the attack reached John Tayler, who was said to be enraged. Tayler was six feet tall and was often described as a pugilistic, fearless “giant.” He was agitated because VanRensselaer had not followed the Code—but he was mostly angry because his intimate friend Jenkins had been assaulted in public. Everyone waited nervously to see how the Republicans would respond.

Two hours later, Tayler was walking with a friend down State Street and saw VanRensselaer ahead.

Bystanders claimed Tayler used the most “foul language” and called VanRensselaer an assassin, scoundrel, and rascal. Many claimed that VanRensselaer became highly agitated by the harsh words and shook his cane at Tayler, daring him to fight.

Tayler was sixty-five, and saw VanRensselaer, who was thirty-three, as a young and arrogant rival. Some claimed that when Tayler caught sight of VanRensselaer, he ran to attack him. Tayler grabbed VanRensselaer’s cane and threw it. Each of them yelled and began throwing punches.

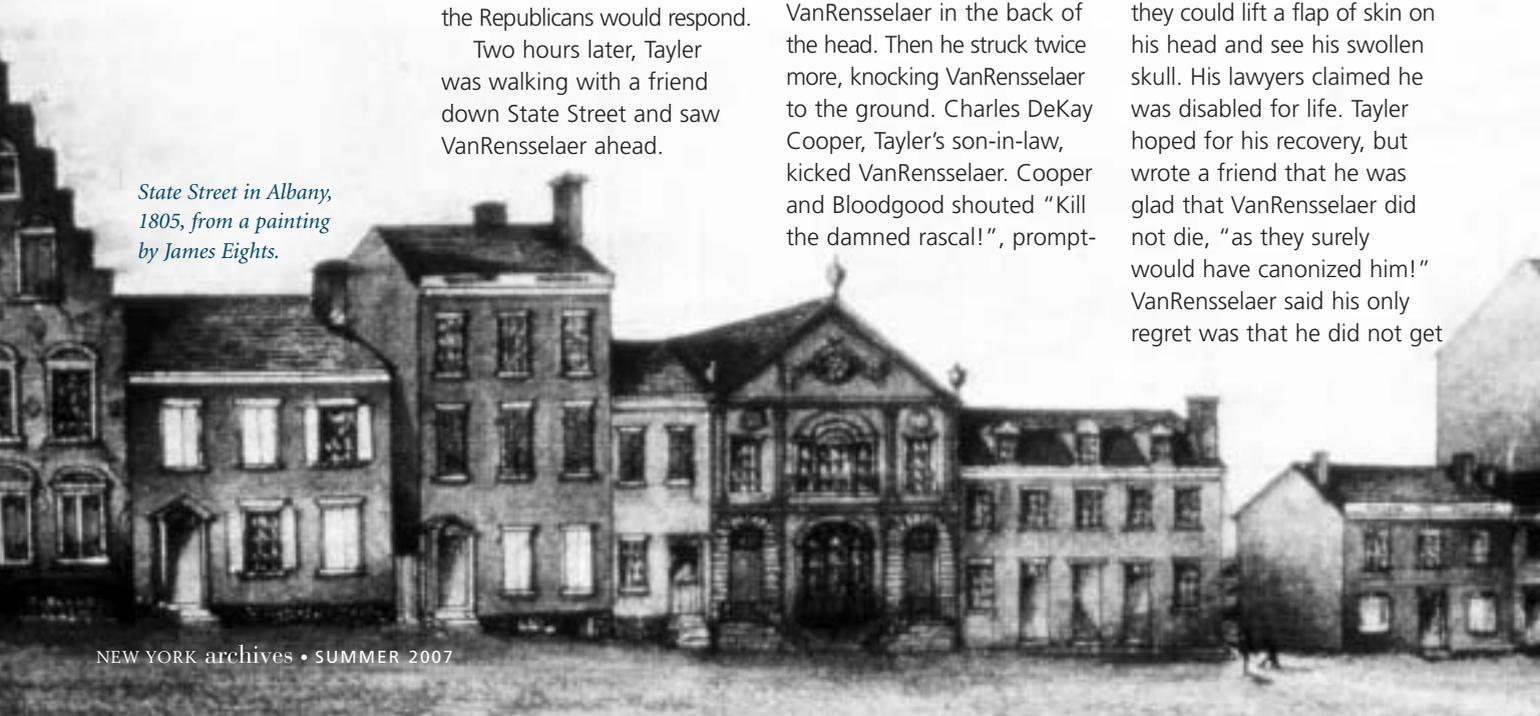
Tayler’s family came to his aid—first on the scene was his pregnant daughter, Peggy, who wedged herself between the men. Up to 100 people then converged on the scene, including Tayler’s nephew, Francis Bloodgood, who saw VanRensselaer punch Tayler’s chest. Bloodgood swung his heavy walking stick like a baseball bat and whacked VanRensselaer in the back of the head. Then he struck twice more, knocking VanRensselaer to the ground. Charles DeKay Cooper, Tayler’s son-in-law, kicked VanRensselaer. Cooper and Bloodgood shouted “Kill the damned rascal!”, prompt-

ing onlookers to assault VanRensselaer.

State Street quickly became an arena where personal conflicts were resolved. People went to the scene armed with metal and wooden sticks and attacked both politicians and enemies. In an age with no police squad, quieting a public fight was left to city officials. Aldermen arrived to disarm citizens, and the mayor and governor tried to bring order. Many of those assaulted and injured were Federalists. No one assaulted Tayler, perhaps showing that he and his party were more popular and respected—or perhaps people feared retribution, so they didn’t strike Republicans. Only two people helped VanRensselaer: his son-in-law Cornelius Schemerhorn, who assaulted at least five people, and the city poormaster, who pulled VanRensselaer to safety.

VanRensselaer was bed-ridden for months in “grave condition.” Doctors reported they could lift a flap of skin on his head and see his swollen skull. His lawyers claimed he was disabled for life. Tayler hoped for his recovery, but wrote a friend that he was glad that VanRensselaer did not die, “as they surely would have canonized him!” VanRensselaer said his only regret was that he did not get

State Street in Albany, 1805, from a painting by James Eights.



THE ARCHIVES CONNECTION

In my research for a biography of John Tayler, I found the best details about the State Street fracas in the newspaper collection at the American Antiquarian Society. This collection is available electronically on Readex. A case transcript is at the New York State Library, and letters are in the State Library's Manuscripts and Special Collections unit and at the New York State Archives. Other manuscripts were found at the Albany Institute of History and Art's McKinney Library, the New-York Historical Society, the New York Public Library, Historic Cherry Hill, and the Albany County Hall of Records.

Tayler alone, believing that he could have taken him down.

At the mayor's insistence, both parties agreed not to publish details of the incident because it would affect the election. However, the Federalists immediately broke the agreement by printing hundreds of handbills (leaflets) portraying Republicans as corrupt, violent leaders. Nevertheless, Tompkins, the Republican candidate, won the governor's race.

Political Justice

Participants were not arrested because it was not part of public policy at the time. Instead, the injured parties obtained lawyers and sued each other for assault and battery. VanRensselaer sued Tayler, Bloodgood, and Cooper, putting the family honor on trial. Jenkins sued VanRensselaer. Because it was faster and less public, all agreed to a council of arbitration instead of a state Supreme Court trial. It took sixteen months for the case to come before arbitrators, one of whom was Tayler's nephew, State Surveyor General Simeon DeWitt. Forty-two witnesses testified for three days and were questioned by six lawyers, who dramatically played up the case as bipartisan politics. But it was clear that

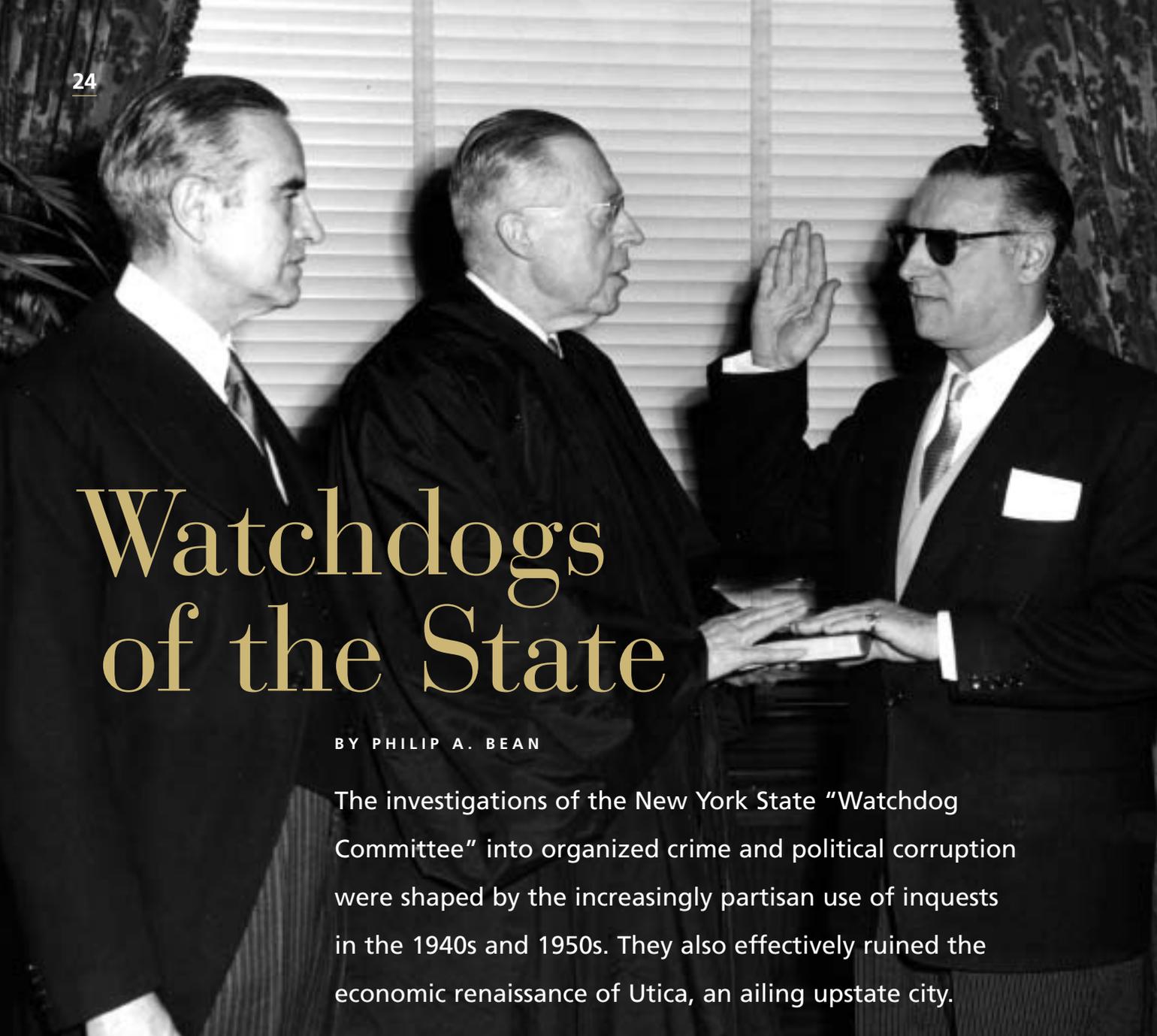
the assaults were personally motivated.

During the hearings, lawyers focused on the walking sticks because they were considered weapons, drawing parallels between canes, social rank, and male power. Seemingly a fashionable accessory, a cane was really a gentleman's badge, and by outfitting themselves with canes men showed their standing and influenced behavior. In Albany, the size of a man's cane held significance: lawyers spoke of their thickness and length as a measure of status. Tayler's stick was so large it was considered his "staff like the trident of Neptune," suggesting he could do great damage. (He was also a senior official, a senator, and affluent.) Bloodgood, Albany's clerk of the Supreme Court, owned a "sizeable" cane made of hickory, the best wood. VanRensselaer, the adjutant general, was seen as inferior because his cane was only as "thick as a man's middle finger." Jenkins had a "small light stick." Municipal officials only carried "little sticks" or "rattans." Raising or shaking one's cane at a rival, as VanRensselaer did, was considered offensive, and lawyers emphasized that receiving a

"stroke" (hit) was incredibly insulting. It is important to note that Democratic-Republicans, who built their popular following by ostracizing traditional aristocrats, caned VanRensselaer, a descendant of the Dutch founders of Albany. If politicians could not bring down opponents in the press, they carried gear to disgrace them in the streets.

No politician's career or reputation suffered because of the fracas. VanRensselaer was awarded \$4,500 in damages, an extraordinary sum for the day, but was ordered to pay Jenkins \$2,500. Tayler paid only \$300 and was later elected lieutenant governor and served as governor. Bloodgood paid a significant \$3,700, but became mayor of Albany and a legislator. Cooper paid \$500 and became secretary of state. Jenkins became mayor of Albany and secretary of state. Although doctors testified VanRensselaer could never ride a horse again, he overcame his "permanent disability," rode into battle during the War of 1812, and became a hero—and later, a United States Congressman. ■





Watchdogs of the State

BY PHILIP A. BEAN

The investigations of the New York State “Watchdog Committee” into organized crime and political corruption were shaped by the increasingly partisan use of inquests in the 1940s and 1950s. They also effectively ruined the economic renaissance of Utica, an ailing upstate city.

Governor Averell Harriman looks on as Chief Judge Albert Conway of the Court of Appeals administers the oath of office to incoming Secretary of State Carmine Desapio, the Tammany Hall leader.

The State Police raid on a gathering of nearly sixty criminals at Apalachin, near Binghamton, in November 1957 is an incident well known to those interested in the history of organized crime. Apalachin was very much a New York event: although “delegates” attended from throughout the country, sixty percent were New Yorkers, over half of whom were from communities west of the Hudson. Less familiar, however, is the political context in which Apalachin occurred,

and the uneven impact the ensuing investigations of it had on New York State.

In the mid-twentieth century, the alleged relationship between urban political machines, municipal corruption, and organized crime was an increasingly important source of Democratic vulnerability. In 1950–51, Senator Estes Kefauver, a Tennessee Democrat, chaired Senate hearings on organized crime that focused on the urban North. Some Democrats hoped

that voters might reward them for permitting an inquest that affected Democratic cities; nevertheless, recognizing that northern political machines did much to underpin their power in Washington, many Democrats also feared that Kefauver’s hearings might play into Republican hands.

New York: Center of the Fight

Events in New York justified these concerns. Both the Republican legislature

and Thomas Dewey, the “crime-busting” Manhattan Republican district attorney elected governor in 1942, recognized that exposing relationships between organized crime and urban Democrats might prove politically advantageous, since Republicans were still contending nationally with charges that they had favored organized wealth rather than the public interest before the Depression. Indeed, Republican efforts in New York to characterize Democrats as “soft on crime” seemed analogous to Republican charges on the national level that Democrats were “soft on Communism” and therefore unworthy of public trust.

Under Dewey, the state investigated Albany’s Democratic O’Connell machine for several years to no avail; the governor and legislative Republicans instigated the unsuccessful prosecution of thirteen Utica Democrats on vote-buying charges in 1949; and Dewey made Tammany Hall, the Manhattan Democratic organization, and its ties to criminals a key issue in his tough but successful 1950 re-election bid. Although Dewey established a special Crime Commission in 1951 that investigated corruption and vice in Republican localities (notably Saratoga County) as well as in Democratic ones, he did so only after Kefauver exposed official toleration of illegal gambling in Saratoga—which the State Police had reportedly known about at least since 1947.

In his final years in office,

Dewey ordered an inquest into corruption and organized crime in Democratic-controlled New York City, and the legislature approved his proposal to establish a permanent Commissioner of Investigations, a gubernatorial appointee with broad latitude to investigate malfeasance statewide. However, in creating this new office, Republicans had not anticipated the election—by a razor-thin margin—of a Democrat, Averell Harriman, as Dewey’s successor in 1954. Consequently, a Democrat, Irwin Shapiro, became Commissioner of Investigations, and after years of Dewey’s investigations Democrats were ready to turn the tables on the Republicans.

The Watchdog Committee

Recognizing the potential danger Shapiro represented, only months after Harriman’s inauguration the legislature established its own investigative body, the so-called “Watchdog Committee,” consisting of eight Republicans and two Democrats. Republicans thus signaled that a new Democratic governor with ties to Tammany Hall—whose leader, Carmine DeSapio, was Harriman’s secretary of state—could not be trusted to administer the state honestly. Republicans also put Democrats on notice that they would respond in kind if Shapiro became too aggressive.

Undeterred by the prospect of retaliatory legislative investigations, Shapiro launched well-publicized, politically embarrassing inquiries into corruption in Republican-

Governor Thomas E. Dewey with his dog, King Canute.



NEW YORK STATE ARCHIVES

Dewey made Tammany Hall, the Manhattan Democratic organization, and its ties to criminals a key issue in his tough but successful 1950 re-election bid.

controlled localities, notably Westchester, Putnam, Suffolk, Nassau, and Ulster Counties. In several of these, Republican voter registration had increased sharply as a result of post-war suburbanization. In Suffolk County alone, Shapiro’s initiatives and those of his successor, Arthur Reuter, eventually yielded over twenty indictments, including one against a Republican assemblyman. Shapiro also investigated corruption charges against Dewey appointees, which



CORBIS



CORBIS

Joseph Barbara and his house in Apalachin, where more than sixty powerful members of crime families from around the country gathered. Some claimed they were there for a barbecue.

quickly led to seventeen resignations in the State Liquor Authority.

Because Shapiro's aggressive pursuit of alleged Republican misconduct antagonized Republicans, the Watchdog Committee commenced a long, highly-publicized inquest early in 1957 into charges that Harriman's administration had surreptitiously permitted Joseph "Socks" Lanza, a gangster with Tammany ties, to escape re-incarceration for parole violations. And then, about six months later, the Apalachin raid occurred.

While the Watchdog Committee subpoenaed Apalachin participants from throughout the state, it subjected only Utica to an inquisition in which a dozen local officials, not just criminal figures, were publicly interrogated.

Apalachin's impact, therefore, cannot be seen exclusively or even primarily from the perspective of the outrage it elicited, or as a result of Kefauver's undeniable effect

on the public consciousness. Like Shapiro, Watchdog investigators were genuinely concerned about the influence of crime and corruption on government, but they were caught in a power struggle between Democrats and Republicans who were determined to embarrass one another by uncovering alleged scandals.

Utica Takes the Heat

This is most apparent in the fate of the upstate city of Utica. While the Watchdog Committee subpoenaed Apalachin participants from throughout the state, it subjected only Utica to an inquisition in which a dozen local officials, not just criminal figures, were publicly interrogated. The singularity of Utica's treatment seems especially noteworthy in light of two facts: only three Apalachin participants came from Utica (indeed, from all of Oneida County), and Utica was the most reliably Democratic municipality of the nine upstate communities represented at Apalachin.

In contrast, the Watchdog

Committee did not subpoena officials from Erie or Niagara Counties, even though together those counties produced six Apalachin delegates and investigators knew that Buffalo-area crime boss Stefano Magaddino was reportedly the only upstater on the nine-man national organized crime "commission." In addition, Utica was singled out partly on the justification that it was supposedly odd that a city of only 100,000 had produced three Apalachin delegates—yet Magaddino and two Apalachin attendees lived in the same neighborhood in Lewiston, a small village in Republican-controlled Niagara County.

To some extent, this focus on Utica arose from a brief press-generated "feeding frenzy" that deflected attention from other potential targets of public interest. The fixation on Utica began with a series of sensationalistic articles in the *New York Journal American* in January 1958 that gave Utica the catchy but hyperbolic label of "The 'Sin City' of the East" just as the Watchdog hearings on Apalachin were

gaining momentum. *Newsweek* published a briefer but equally overheated feature on Utica, and more even-handed but relatively frequent portage in the *New York Times* and the *New York Daily News* kept Utica in the headlines for well over a year.

Still, the divergent fates of Utica and metropolitan Buffalo—not to mention other communities—in the Watchdog hearings also arose from the strengths and vulnerabilities of each community's patrons. Buffalo's Walter Mahoney, the majority leader of the State Senate, was one of the most powerful Republicans in New York; he was also not immune to accusations of connections to organized crime. Mahoney allegedly helped a visitor gain access to "Socks" Lanza at Attica Prison in the 1940s, and in January 1958 Mahoney was compelled to admit that he had provided legal counsel to a company owned by Apalachin delegate and Magaddino lieutenant John C. Montana.

Montana, the most politically active Apalachin attendee from New York State, was a former Republican member of the Buffalo City Council, an alternate delegate to the 1936 Republican National Convention, and a Republican Congressional candidate in 1938. In 1956, a Buffalo police organization had named him "Man of the Year." In his testimony before the Watchdog Committee, a defiant Montana boasted publicly that he knew Richard Nixon, a claim



Governor Harriman (shown here at the Hotel Utica during his unsuccessful re-election campaign in 1958) fostered the city's reputation as corrupt and crime-ridden.

the vice president's office angrily denied but that made national headlines. Perhaps not surprisingly, the Republican-dominated Watchdog Committee was not inclined to investigate western New York.

Consequences

The selectivity of the Watchdog Committee's work also seems apparent in the fact that public officials from heavily Republican Broome County were not called to testify, even though Broome County was home to five Apalachin delegates and several brutal gangland murders remained unsolved there. In addition, it was known that a Republican Watchdog Committee member from Broome County had tried to help Carmine Galante, later the Bonanno Family boss, out of legal difficulty in 1956, although the assemblyman maintained that he desisted in his efforts once he became aware of Galante's very significant criminal history. A similar confluence of factors—a local history of organized crime activity, supposedly disproportionate local representation at Apalachin, and the linking of local public officials with criminals—had



Mob boss Vito Genovese leaves a courtroom in 1960. He allegedly organized the meeting at Apalachin.

helped make Utica the primary target of the Watchdog Committee, but somehow Broome County, like Erie and Niagara Counties, did not elicit Watchdog scrutiny.

At the same time, the "Socks" Lanza affair put Governor Harriman, presumably the natural champion of an upstate Democratic stronghold like Utica, on the defensive. Sacrificing Utica, a small city whose Democrats had reportedly differed with Harriman over patronage issues, offered a palatable way for a beleaguered Democratic governor seeking re-election to counter accusations that he was "lax" on crime and interested only in Republican



The fixation on Utica began with a series of sensationalistic articles that gave Utica the catchy but hyperbolic label of “The ‘Sin City’ of the East.”

wrongdoing. Harriman therefore supported efforts to investigate Utica even after he struck a deal in the spring of 1958 to replace both the Commissioner of Investigations and the Watchdog Committee with a bipartisan legislative State Crime Commission.

By 1959, when Utica’s newspapers won a Pulitzer Prize for investigating local corruption, the press had begun shifting public attention from Apalachin to the McClellan Committee’s inquest into the reported ties between Teamsters President Jimmy Hoffa and organized crime. Nevertheless, Apalachin inflicted lasting damage on Utica. Prior to Apalachin, local bankers, in league with Utica’s Democrats, were replacing empty local textile mills with electronics factories, but this economic renaissance, which inspired a positive feature story in *Fortune* magazine in 1949, ended partly because of Utica’s new national reputation as a uniquely corrupt, crime-ridden town. Although *Look* magazine scoffed at the suggestion that

Utica was “Sin City,” such skepticism could not undo the damage Utica suffered during this period.

More importantly, New York’s “investigation wars” and similar Congressional inquests in the 1940s and 1950s helped to legitimize the use of open-ended, politically motivated inquisitions and the characterization of political opponents as being “soft” on issues, like crime and Communism, about which the public was fearful. The inquests conducted by Dewey, the Watchdog Committee, and the Commissioner of Investigations and their counterparts in Washington embody the modern genesis of a type of political gamesmanship injurious to public discourse that has since become a prominent feature of American national political life. New York State seems to have been on the “cutting edge” of this less-than-praiseworthy political trend, the significance of which contemporary Americans might be well advised to ponder. ■

THE ARCHIVES CONNECTION

I relied on two major sources for this article. The collection at the State Archives called the Temporary State Crime Commission includes, among other items, correspondence of the Joint Legislative Committee on Government Operations (the Watchdog Committee); documents from the gubernatorial Commissioner of Investigations; and records from the bipartisan Temporary State Crime Commission, which replaced both the Watchdog Committee and the Democratic Commissioner of Investigations in the spring of 1958.

In addition, the *New York Times* from 1950–60 detailed the political history of localities beyond New York City.

The Party of the First (and Second) Part

BY JAMES D. FOLTS

Among the 100,000 cubic feet of records in the State Archives are many unusual items: colonial documents written in Dutch, French, or Latin instead of English; documents written on parchment (stretched, polished sheepskin); and documents employing medieval terminology derived from English common law. But the oldest—and to our eyes, perhaps the oddest—type of document in the Archives is the chirograph.

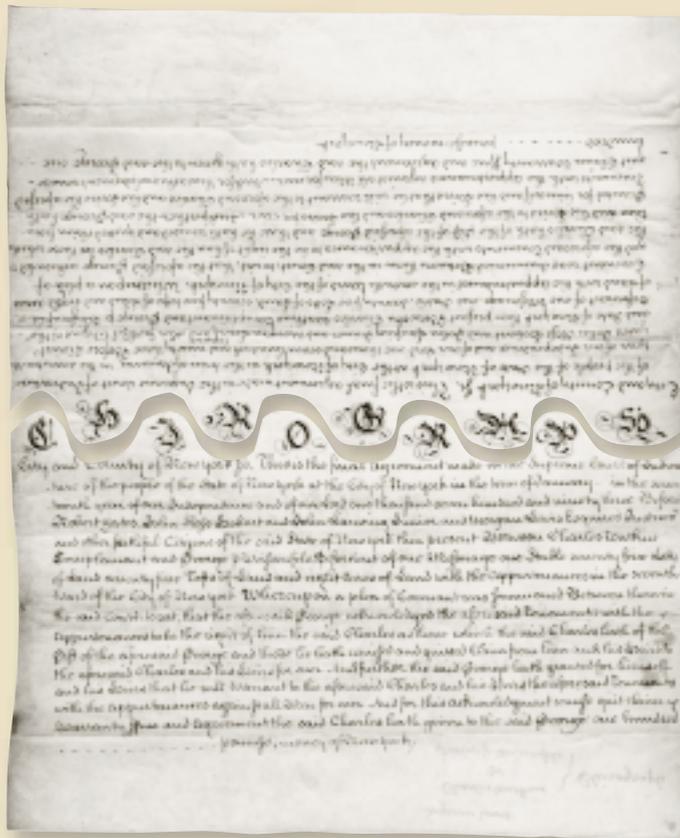
The term originated in ancient Roman law, and means “handwritten” in Greek. In Anglo-Saxon England, a chirograph was the generic term for a written contract between two parties. The terms of the contract were engrossed (written in a formal hand) in duplicate on a single piece of parchment. Separating the two copies of the document (the “part” and the “counterpart”) was the word **CHIROGRAPH**. A clerk then physically cut the document through or around the letters of this word in a wavy, indented, toothlike line, and each of the parties to the contract received one piece of the document. Thus the contract could be easily authenticated by matching the part and the counterpart, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Forgery was practically impossible—just try to replicate a wavy cut in a piece of paper using a knife or scissors. This concept of a multi-part document came to be used for real property deeds and apprenticeship agreements (also called “indentures”) and other types of contracts between consenting parties.

The chirographs in the State Archives (series J1011) were filed with the clerk of the New York Supreme Court of Judicature between 1793 and 1829. They document a common-law action called “fine and recovery.” In that proceeding, title to real property was conveyed from a seller to a buyer in open court, in the presence of justices. The proceeding involved a

fictitious lawsuit, although the plaintiff (buyer) and defendant (seller) had previously agreed to have the court determine title and finalize the conveyance. The action of fine and recovery was cumbersome and antiquated, dating to the eleventh century. Some cautious New York lawyers employed the proceeding because it forever quieted any challenge to the title of the property conveyed.

The chirograph shown here dates from 1793; it conveys a plot of land in the Seventh Ward of New York City. Like other chirographs, the document is written on parchment in an antique English “court” hand. ■

Chirographs like this one are the oldest type of document in the State Archives.



NEW YORK STATE ARCHIVES

Clues from the Coroner

BY MELDON J. WOLFGANG III

On a crisp December day in 1702, Jacob van Noorstrant went off into the western woods beyond the City of Albany's stockade to cut trees. Later that afternoon, van Noorstrant lay dead, and the mayor of the city wanted to know why.

In his official role as coroner, Mayor Albert Janse Ryckman instructed Sheriff Jacob Turke to summon twelve "good and lawful" men to investigate van Noorstrant's untimely death. The hastily assembled coroner's jury listened first to fifty-seven-year-old Gerritt van Ness, who swore that he and van Noorstrant were in the woods on the Schenectady Road about three o'clock in the afternoon cutting down pine trees. As the large tree that he was cutting began to lean and fall, van Ness suddenly realized that van Noorstrant was working in

deaths, coroners have been issuing reports on accidental or unexplained deaths, including murders and suicides, for more than three centuries. Often predating official death records, coroners' reports usually contain highly specific information documenting the time, place, and manner of the death in question, and sometimes contain genealogically significant testimony about the deceased that is unavailable elsewhere. In addition, jury reports are signed by each of the jurors, thus providing signature specimens for comparison with examples on other documents, like deeds and wills.

Family historians may find that coroners' inquest reports can be helpful to their research even when their ancestor is not the subject of the investigation. Coroner's juries often call many local witnesses, and the testimony presented at an inquest may include both genealogical facts (for example, exact age and place of birth) and further research clues (occupation and residence) about the witnesses themselves.

Fortunately for genealogists, coroners and coroner's juries have been part of New York's legal framework from the earliest times.

the very spot where the falling tree was going to come crashing down. Van Ness shouted a warning to his friend, but his cries were drowned out by the noise of the falling tree, which hurtled down onto van Noorstrant and killed him on the spot.

After hearing testimony from van Ness' twenty-one-year-old nephew who was also in the woods at the same time, the coroner's jury ruled that Jacob van Noorstrant's death was an accident. A summary of the proceedings was entered into the city's official records on Friday evening, December 8, 1702.

Fortunately for genealogists, coroners and coroner's juries have been part of New York's legal framework from the earliest times. Charged with investigating unexpected or suspicious

"Falling Like Grain from a Hopper"

Consider the information that a researcher can glean from the coroner's inquest into what came to be known as the Ninth Ward School Disaster. On November 20, 1851, Miss Abby Harrison, a teacher in a second-floor classroom at Public School 26 on Greenwich Avenue in Manhattan, suffered a stroke-like attack and fell to the floor of her classroom. Her face was paralyzed and contorted, and she was unable to speak. Her class of young children, thinking that their teacher was dying, ran screaming from the room. Children in all the surrounding classrooms on the second floor and on the floor above heard the screams and panicked, believing the building was on fire. In a few minutes, hundreds of wildly screaming children were racing out of their classrooms, trying to escape. Pushing and shoving against each other, the frightened children surged toward the circular staircase in the center of the build-

This report by New York City Coroner John Burnet describes Isabella as “a very weak...molatto woman” jailed in August, 1749 for “murdering her bastard child”; she died in jail less than a month later.

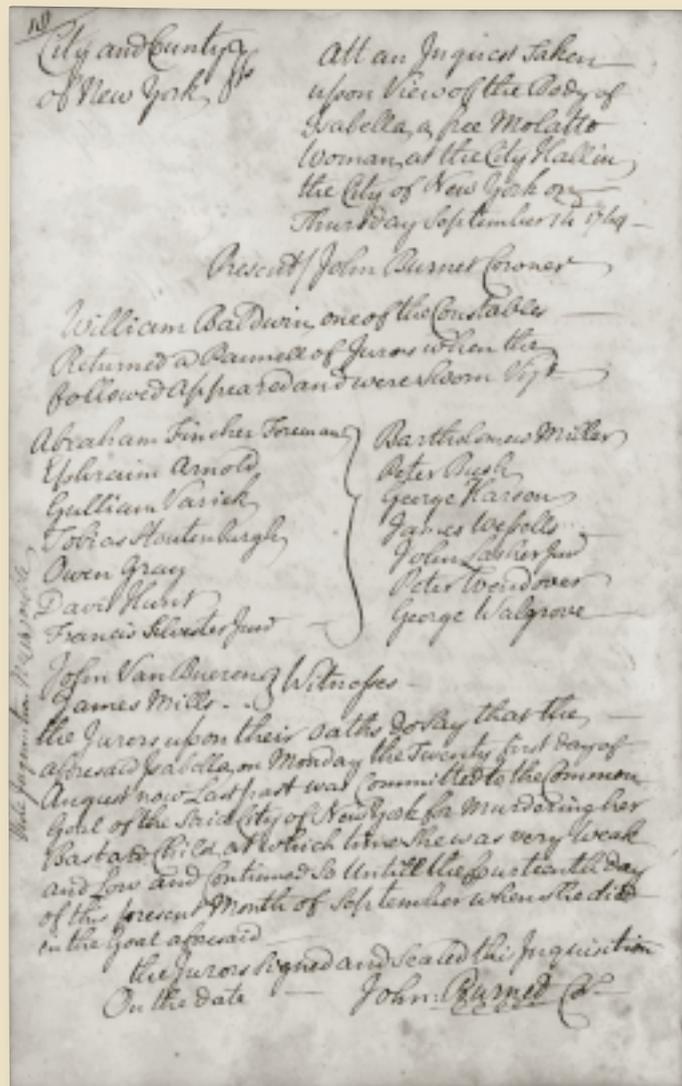
ing. The wooden railings on the stairs and landings gave way, and masses of children began to plummet lemming-like to the stone floor below. The first wave of falling children died on impact, while others were suffocated by the weight of those who landed on top of them. A policeman who arrived at the chaotic scene described the children as falling “...like grain from a hopper.” By the end of the day, forty-three children were dead and nearly thirty more were seriously injured.

For the next five days, the sixteen men who made up the coroner’s jury conducted an inquest into the deaths. The jurors viewed the body of each dead child and took testimony from teachers, parents, and the surviving students. Policemen and firemen offered up information, along with neighbors, workmen, and the school trustees. Every day, newspapers published graphic verbatim accounts of the testimony, which usually included the age, occupation, and residence of each witness. For genealogists tracing families in this neighborhood, the coroner’s inquest into the Ninth Ward School Disaster provides a wealth of information.

Unique Resources

While early coroner’s inquests are unique resources for genealogists, locating them is not always easy, since they are sometimes commingled with other government proceedings or housed in unexpected locations. For example, the inquests conducted by New York City coroner John Burnet for the period 1747 to 1758 are with the Van Cortlandt papers in the Columbia University Library’s special collections.

Researchers investigating nineteenth-century New York City families should consider the genealogical information that can be found in coroner’s inquests from 1823 to 1898, which are housed in the Municipal Archives. Kenneth Scott’s abstracts of nearly 10,000 of these inquest proceedings up to 1849 have been



published, and serve as useful finding aids to the actual records.

For areas north of New York City, researchers can consult the coroner’s records for the period 1800 to 1911 in the Westchester County Archives, or those in the Putnam County Archives covering the years 1820 to 1913. For coroner’s records in other counties, a review of the holdings of the local county archives or county clerk’s office is usually the best place to start.

Even if all that remain are the printed abstracts of inquests that appear in the annual published proceedings of a county’s board of supervisors, coroners’ reports are worth investigating for the genealogical clues they contain. ■

Before E-ZPass



NEW YORK STATE ARCHIVES

This photograph is labeled “Taking Toll at an Old-Time Tollgate,” and was taken in Climax, Greene County, in 1909.

Turnpikes are roads that are financed by tolls levied on users. They are named from the bar, or “pike,” used as a tollgate; these gates were located every five or ten miles along the road. Turnpike companies granted broad concessions to local residents, who paid no tolls while traveling to perform religious or civic duties.

The last of the major northeastern states to adopt the turnpike system, New York chartered its first turnpike in 1797 and quickly became the leader in construction of turnpike miles. New York’s turnpikes were concentrated between the Hudson and Genesee Rivers. Portions of the New York–Albany Post Road

were turnpiked, and toll roads ran from all of the major towns on the east bank of the Hudson into the New England states.

A few short turnpikes, including portions of those near Albany, remained economically viable, and some new turnpikes were chartered as late as 1888. Government-funded paved highways, financed by taxes rather than tolls, finally replaced turnpikes, although a few survived into the first decades of the twentieth century. Today, state- and U.S.-numbered highways occupy the beds of many old turnpikes. ■

Excerpted from *The Encyclopedia of New York State* (Syracuse University Press, 2005)

“Parting Shots” are chosen from more than 500,000 images in the collections of the New York State Archives.

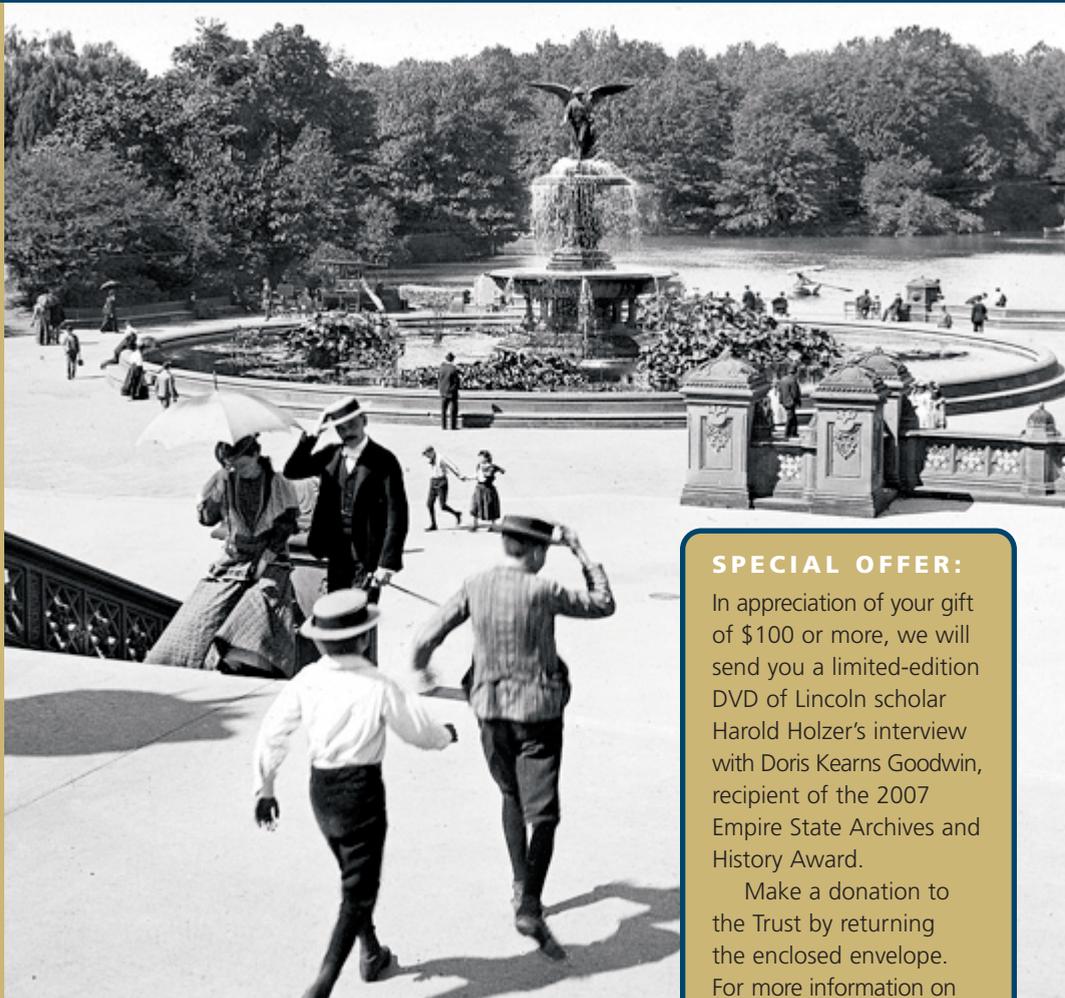
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