

**Saturday, September 10<sup>th</sup>, 5:30 pm – Sunset Supper at the Rhinecliff**

Tom Daley will give a lecture and slide show about the Great Estates of Rhinebeck  
(See flyer inside of this newsletter)

## President's Message Fall 2011

RHS's summer began with a tour of Rhinecliff given by board member Mike Frazier on May 21. We spent two hours walking around the hamlet with learning about its history. I filmed the event and RHS member Leigh Anne Bishop is editing the tape to put on PANDA. The current plan is for Leigh Anne or me filming all of our events and editing them for both TV and to have them available in our archives.

On June 18<sup>th</sup> we had our annual picnic at The Locusts. The event was a sellout. Warren Temple Smith lectured on the history of the estate as we toured the mansion and barns. Many thanks to thank Andre Belzas for sharing his fabulous property with us and our guests for the day. I also wanted to thank the Rhinecliff Hotel for the best ever picnic lunches. Yum!

Plans are underway for our September 10 Sunset Supper. Photographer Tom Daley will lecture at the Rhinecliff Hotel on the Great Estates of Rhinebeck. He was born on the Astor estate, where his father worked. He has spent a lifetime photographing and researching the history of our local estates. You will see the Rhinebeck that was and in some cases still is. It will be a good time to spend with old friends, enjoy a great meal at the Rhinecliff and participate in our silent auction and pick up some great deals. Reserve your seat early. We expect another sellout event.

Did you know that 2012 is the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the separation of Red Hook from Rhinebeck? I have had several meetings with Claudine Klose the new president of the Red Hook Historical Society (EBHS). She and her colleagues are planning many

events for next year and we are working on a joint event to commemorate the occasion.

Whether you are away for the summer or remaining in Rhinebeck, I hope that you take the opportunity to delve into local history. Here's wishing you a safe and happy summer.

**David Miller, President**

## **The Rhinebeck Connecticut Railroad By David Miller**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we are used to rapid technological changes. It is hard to believe that the first iPhone was sold in June of 2007. Throughout human history technology has always moved forward albeit at a much slower pace. For thousands of years the major method of moving people and goods was by boat and horse drawn wagons. The problems were that rivers did not go everywhere and horses could only pull a small amount of goods or people over roads that were not always passable.

In the early 1800's, in England, the first steam locomotive was invented and over the next few decades railroads spread rapidly throughout England and America. Trains played a major role in the industrial revolution because labor was cheap; it was easy to lay track and trains provided a fast way to move a lot of heavy materials and many people over great distances at high speeds. In fact, it was the railroad that made the violet industry in Rhinebeck possible. No other form of transportation could have moved thousands of perishable plants to NYC in only 3 hours.

In 1837 Thomas Cornell of Kingston started what would become the Cornell Steamboat Company. By the end of the Civil War he controlled virtually all freight traffic on the Hudson River. His barges brought coal via the Delaware and Hudson Canal from Pennsylvania to the Roundout and then on to Rhinecliff. He also operated passenger ferries to Rhinecliff. Cornell formed the Rhinebeck and Connecticut Railroad Company to move his coal eastward. The RCRR was chartered in 1870 with capital of \$1,000,000. The survey of the right of way took nearly a year and construction began in 1871 at Slate Dock and track was laid as far as Red Hook by 1873. The stock market crash called "the panic of 1873" slowed down construction and cancelled Cornell's plans to build a bridge across the Hudson. Progress moved slowly but, by 1875, the track reached State Line where it merged with the Connecticut Western RR heading west. A timetable, dated July 12<sup>th</sup>, 1875, lists the stations as Rhinecliff, Rhinebeck, Red Hook, Spring Lake, Ellerslie, Jackson Corners, Mount Ross, Gallatinville, Ancram, Copake, Boston Corners, Mt. Riga and State line.

There were two trains daily in each direction over the 42 mile line. The morning train left Rhinecliff at 7:00 am and arrived at State Line at 10:10 am, if it was on time, which was often not the case. This three hour trip across the 42 miles of Dutchess and Columbia counties gave the train the nicknames of the 'Hucklebush Line' or 'Huckleberry Line' because the train went so slow in certain sections that you could reach out and pick huckleberries from the bushes as you went past.



Map of the RCRR

The 1880 New York Railroad Commissioner's report contained some statistics about the line. There were 96 people employed by the railroad receiving a total salary of \$29,500. The average freight rate was 1.8 cents per ton per mile and 3 cents per passenger mile. The line ran at a deficit of \$223,000 that year which was not a good start for the railroad.

According to the 1871-1882 Locomotive Roster, there were 5 engines on the line. They were moved and switched in Rhinecliff on a sixty foot turntable and stored in a four stall roundhouse which was located on the site of the current Rhinebeck Village water treatment plant.

The train worked its way slowly up the hill from Rhinecliff. You can see, from the picture of the Slate Dock freight station below, that there used to be 4 tracks along the river and there was a trestle over them to allow for the connection to the southbound track from the east. The train line supported many kinds of commerce in Dutchess County. There was, of course, much freight and passenger traffic around Rhinecliff and the docks. The train was used to transport coal to feed the boilers of the Rhinebeck violet greenhouses and to bring the violets to the city.

RHINEBECK & CONNECTICUT R. R.			
TIME TABLE			
Takes Effect Monday, July 12 <sup>th</sup> , 1875.			
TRAINS GOING WEST.			
STATIONS.	3 A. M.	4 P. M.	
State Line, (C. W. RR. Juc.) Depart	6 34	1 31	
Mt. Riga	6 43	1 41	
Boston Corners	6 55	1 59	
Copake	7 13	2 17	
Ancram	7 33	2 42	
Gallatinville	7 47	2 51	
Mount Ross	7 50	3 04	
Jackson Corners	8 15	3 17	
Ellerslie	8 33	3 34	
Spring Lake	8 43	3 44	
Red Hook	8 59	4 03	
Rhinebeck	9 13	4 22	
Rhinecliff.....Arrive	9 30	4 35	
TRAINS GOING EAST.			
STATIONS	1 A. M.	3 P. M.	
Rhinecliff....Depart	7 00	3 39	
Rhinebeck	7 14	3 44	
Red Hook	7 33	4 03	
Spring Lake	7 49	4 20	
Ellerslie	7 57	4 29	
Jackson Corners	8 15	4 47	
Mount Ross	8 28	4 50	
Gallatinville	8 41	4 53	
Ancram	8 51	5 23	
Copake	9 16	5 48	
Boston Corners	9 45	6 18	
Mt. Riga	9 59	6 33	
State Line, (C. W. R. R. Junction).	10 10	6 45	

Trains Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4 will run daily, Sundays excepted.



Slate Dock Freight Station

Sari Tietjen, in her book “Rhinebeck – Portrait of a Town”, quotes a young Robert Asher’s experience with the train; *“The train would go rumbling and creaking down through the Astor estate, over a timber trestle and thence to Rhinecliff. If all was well they let ‘the boy’ ring the bell at the crossings. The line terminated at the platform of the Rhinecliff station. After freight and cars had been delivered, the engine backed up to the spur to the turntable which was located at the present water plant site. All hands then climbed down and pushed the turntable around heading the engine for the return trip. The engineer would slow down going through Hogs’s Bridge and yours truly would make a running jump to get off. Great Fun!”*.



Rhinebeck Passenger Station (CNE)  
 Courtesy Historical Society of Rhinebeck NY  
 Agent John Creed at Hogs Bridge

The Hogs Bridge station was located at the north end of Montgomery Street, near the Rhinebeck Kill. A small industrial area developed around the station including the Lown Coal Company, Rhinebeck Coal Company, a Shellac Factory and the Dutchess Light, Heat and Power Company which later became Central Hudson and brought Rhinebeck its first electricity. There was one other unofficial station. Since the right of way passed through Astor property, permission was given

for the construction of a small private station on the Astor property for family use. The line then ran up parallel to what would become Route 9 (across from to Stop and Shop) to the Red Hook station, stopping at Weys Crossing at the intersection of Routes 9 and 9G, where passengers could board the train. No station house was ever located there. The Red Hook station was across the tracks from the Baker’s chocolate factory in what is now Agway. They made 20,000 pounds of chocolate a day, most of which was shipped on the RCRR. Here is a picture of Engine #38 parked at the Red Hook Station.



From there it headed east to Connecticut. Some other types of commercial traffic are mentioned in the NY Times, August 10, 1874: *“Three thousand bales of hay alone have thus far been transported this season, together with considerable quantities of other produce. From Gallatinville sixty barrels of flour are shipped every week by H. Van Valkenburg; while from Ancram the product of Peasley’s paper mills forms no inconsiderable item.”*

In 1888 the Poughkeepsie RR Bridge was built and a line ran from the bridge up to Silver Nails (a stop between Mount Ross and Galletinville) where it merged with the RCRR. As freight began to move over the bridge, river traffic from Kingston to Rhinecliff began to decline, having a major effect on the RCRR.

The railroad struggled along for the next few decades until, once again, technology intervened. In 1908 Henry Ford delivered the first Model T to the public and the world changed again. The public became enamored with automobile transportation and construction of modern roads began in earnest around the country, while railroad ridership began to decline. With better roads there was a rapid expansion of the nation’s truck fleet. Trucks could move much heavier

materials then horse drawn carriages and had one advantage over trains; door to door service. Lastly, with better roads came the expansion of interstate bus travel leading to a further decline in passenger demand. So began the slow decline of the railroads. In 1933 passenger service ended on the RCRR and the line was abandoned and tracks torn up in 1938. The tracks were torn up and nothing but the road bed remains today. I was told that most the tracks were sold as scrap metal to Japan just two years prior to the start of World War II. The picture below is of the last train out of Hogs Bridge with little Nancy Lown standing with some unidentified men.



History and technology are always moving forward. 100 years from now iPhones and the like, will be displayed in museums as relics of the past.

As a sidebar to this article, I'm pleased to report that RCRR has piqued the interest of some younger members of our community. One day in the archives, Mike Frazier and I met with the middle school history teacher, Henry Frischknecht. His class wanted to work with us on a local history project. I sent him the preliminary draft of this article and some of my research material and the students loved it. They began researching the railroad themselves. Henry is trying to teach them about primary sources so they prepared a list of questions for guest speakers Vern Sipperley and John Lobotsky who came to the middle school to be interviewed by the youngsters about their memories of the RCRR. We are also looking to form a junior RHS at the middle school this fall.



John Lobotsky and Vern Sipperley

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*The RHS is looking for volunteers to help in the local history room at the Starr Library. The room is open to the public on Thursdays from 10 am to 4 pm. Scholars and researchers come in looking for help with their work, and others send in research requests via email. Volunteers could either assist them directly or do so indirectly by working with the collections in our archives. No prior research skills are necessary. However, attention to detail, interest in history, delight in working with other people, and joy at solving puzzles are all most desirable. It is a great opportunity to learn about our town while helping others. For information call Mike Frazier at 845.876.7462 or e-mail [michaelfrazier@earthlink.net](mailto:michaelfrazier@earthlink.net).*

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*All members are encouraged to submit articles for publication in our newsletter. If you have done some research on a historical subject, visited a historic site or simply have some history about our town that you would like to share, please contact us for information about how to submit an article for inclusion in the newsletter.*

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**The RHS board would like to take this opportunity to welcome our newest members who joined this quarter**

Diane and Richard Platt  
Rich Weltzer

Wendy Bush Lyons, Esq.  
Optimus Architecture