A CREASE IN THE LANDSCAPE

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Perspectives on the Working Landscape of the Slate Valley of New York

by LAKES TO LOCKS PASSAGE

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COVER ILLUSTRATION: Martha Levy, *Men Working in the Slate Quarry*, oil on canvas, 1939. Created by the Federal Art Project Works Progress Administration and lent to the Slate Valley Museum by the Fine Arts collection of the U.S. General Services Administration.

INSIDE COVER: The slate belt of eastern New York and western Vermont. U.S. Geological Survey, *Nineteenth annual report*, 1897-98 (Slate Valley Museum)

PAGE ONE: Slate quarry showing Owen Jones Carriage and billy wheel. Photograph by Neil Rappaport. (Slate Valley Museum)

TITLE PAGE: Slate splitting tools. Photograph by Neil Rapapport. (Slate Valley Museum)m)

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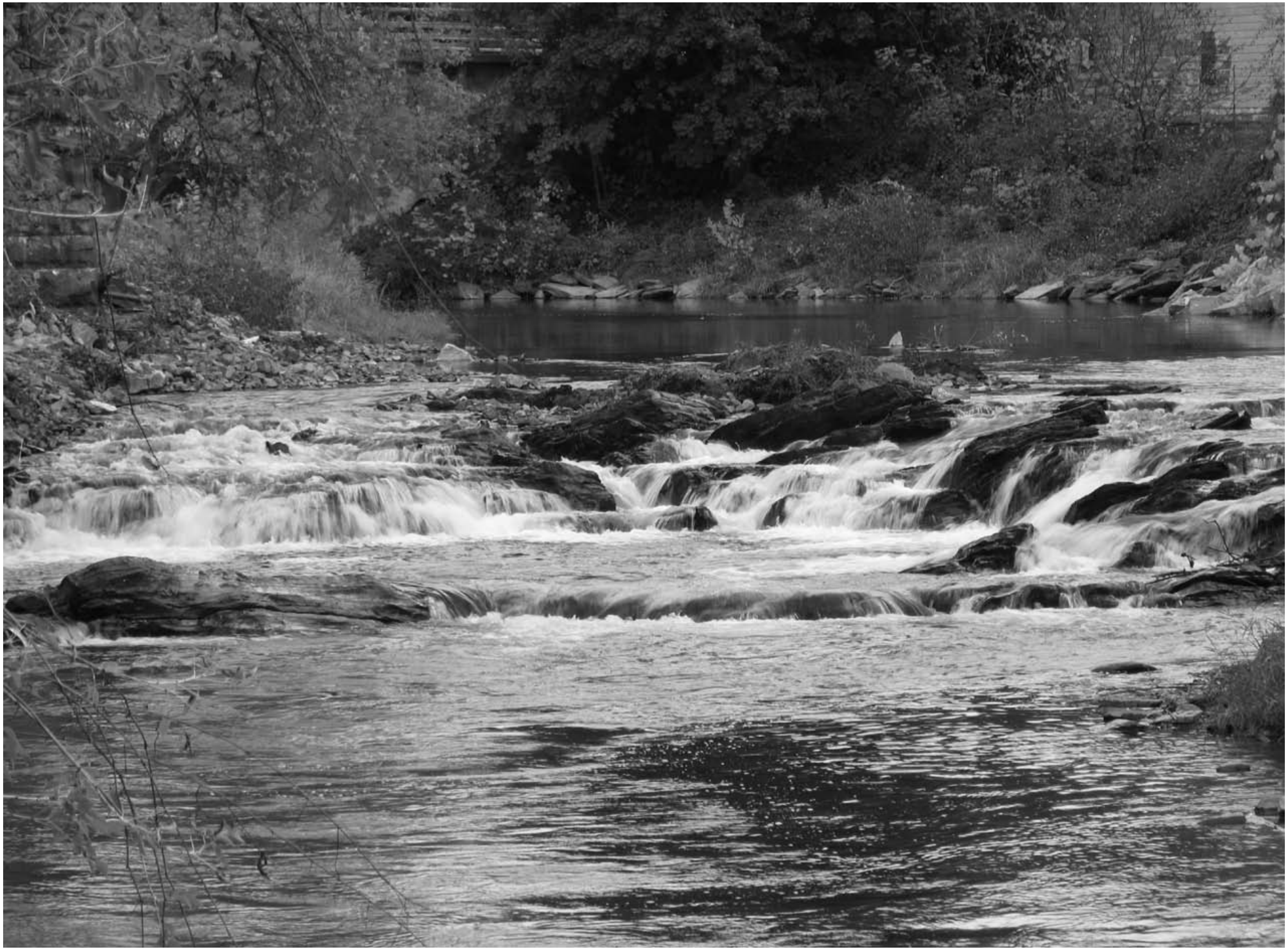
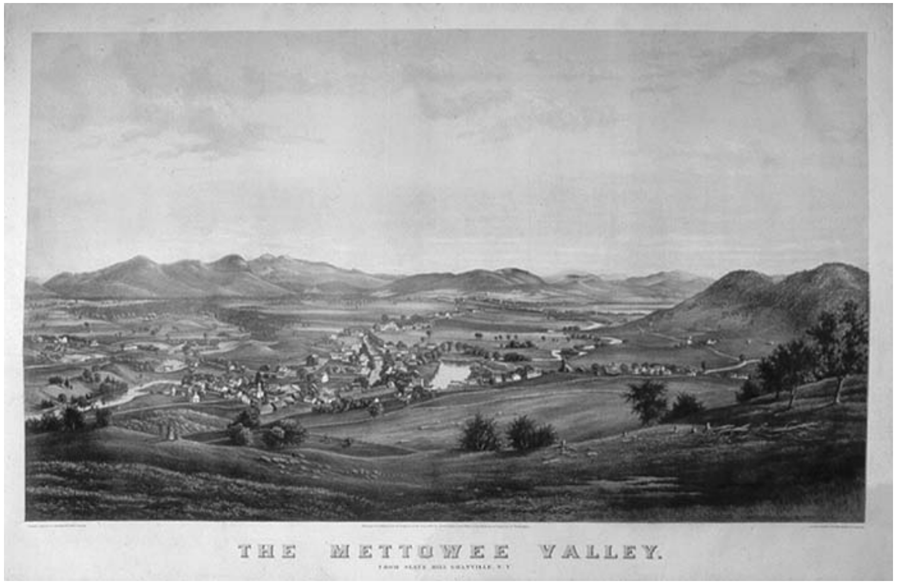


The Mettowee River (Slate Valley Museum)

Contours of the Slate Valley

What we experience today—these hills, lakes, valleys, forests and rivers—must be understood as a single moment in the history of an evolving landscape. The Adirondack Mountains are rising, while the Taconic and Green Mountain ranges are slowly eroding. The land beneath our feet is continually disturbed as the continental plates shift ever so slightly over long periods of time.



The Mettowee Valley. From Slate Hill Granville, N.Y. Frank Childs, 1873. (New York State Museum)

Millions of years ago, as these mountain ranges began to take shape, a narrow band of slate formed deep within the earth. Geologically, the Slate Valley of eastern New York and western Vermont is nearly eighty miles long and lies within the northern portion of the Taconic Mountain range. The "Valley of Vermont" lies to the east of this region and separates the Taconics from the Green Mountains. The Adirondacks rise thirty miles to the west, Lake Champlain lies to the northwest, and the Hudson River to the southwest. Today, the ecosystem of the Slate Valley is a transitional zone from the boreal forests of the north to the Appalachian deciduous forests of the south.

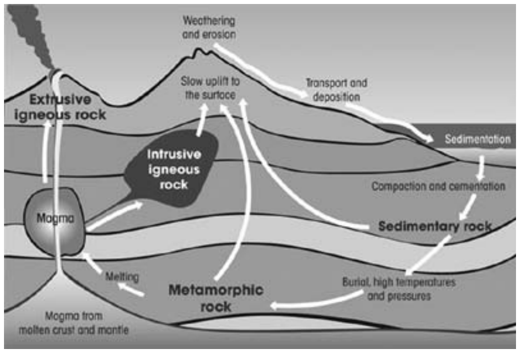
This land of hills and valleys created opportunities and obstacles for the earliest human inhabitants as well as the Europeans who followed. The north-south orientation of the mountain ranges and valleys made transportation and settlement difficult, impeded social and political organization, and created a region that is still found to be rather secluded from the outside world. Today, communities of the Slate Valley reflect the diverse cultures of the people who came to call this place home. The working landscape, dotted with comfortable villages, numerous small lakes and rivers and diverse wildlife habitats, creates a livable landscape with outstanding recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike.

The Land and Earliest Peoples

The natural forces that gave the land its contours, and the waterways their courses, shaped the lives of all inhabitants of the Slate Valley. Half a billion years ago, continental plates rammed together to form the great supercontinent, Pangea. In the process, all the mountain ranges to the east of here were thrown up in succession: the Taconic Mountains of New York, the Green Mountains of Vermont and the White Mountains of New Hampshire and Maine. SUNY Plattsburgh geologist Dr. David Franzi calls this region "the suture zone of a continental collision."

Mountains Shape the Region

The Slate Valley lies near the northern end of the Taconic Mountains, a long, narrow range that runs for two hundred miles along New York's eastern border with Vermont, Massachusetts and Connecticut. The Taconic Range began rising during the Ordovician period of the earth's geologic history, 440 million years ago, during a tectonic collision known as the Taconic Orogeny.



The Dynamic Earth. An exhibit at The National Museum of Natural History (Smithsonian Institute)

Foliated slate (Slate Valley Museum)

At the beginning of this mountain-building era, the "basement rock" of the North American continent had eroded away, depositing a deep layer of clay off shore. As the African plate slowly pushed a chain of volcanic islands over the continental shelf, the clay sediment was squeezed under tremendous heat and pressure, changing from silt to shale and finally to slate. This series of tectonic events created a "crease" in the landscape. The brittle slate broke into slabs that were thrust westward along almost horizontal faults and left lying at an angle, like slices of cheese arranged on a plate. Heat and pressure caused minerals in the slate to line up in layers, forming rock that can be sliced neatly into any thickness.

Most slate looks grey, like the clay that formed it. But the slate formations of the Taconic Range come in many colors. Indeed, this is the only slate region in the world that contains the full range of colors, from green to purple to red. The composition of the original sediment determines the color of a slate deposit. Erosion of iron-rich soils in an oxygen-rich environment produced red slate, found in and around Granville. Iron oxide exposed to an oxygen-starved environment produced green and purple slate. When used in combination with "slate grey" material, these colors can produce decorative as well as durable roofing and building material.

The Ice Cometh

The advance of the Laurentide glacier eighteen thousand years ago covered this landscape with a layer of ice five thousand feet deep. Packed with silt, gravel and huge boulders picked up along its path, the massive ice sheet plowed through the narrow valleys, shaping the current topography of the region. As the glacier ground its way south, it smoothed the summits of mountains and tore away huge chunks of their south faces, leaving a juxtaposition of ridges and valleys that straddle a continental divide. The streams that tumble off the Taconic Mountains go in opposite directions. The Poultney and Mettowee rivers cut deep valleys through glacial till, flowing northward towards Lake Champlain and the Saint Lawrence River. The shallower Batten Kill, Walloomsac, and Hoosic rivers flow south and west into the Hudson River.

Cliff face below Carvers Falls showing glacial scouring (Paul Hancock)

Rubble stone wall (Virginia Westbrook)

As the climate warmed, a huge lake formed, covering an area five times larger than Lake Champlain with a surface level 700 feet higher. The action of the glacier had ground the brittle metamorphic rock of this region into fine silt that settled to the bottom of Glacial Lake Vermont as stratified clay substrate. These soils lie in banded layers, with light-colored summer deposits alternating with dark-colored winter deposits.

Rocks dropped by the receding glacier continue to erupt from the soil every spring. Every landowner gets their fair share, from which many have built stonewalls to mark field divisions and farm property lines. Soils eroded from these rocks support a thriving farm economy. The legacy of the glacier also lives on in the groundwater, as fine mineral particles, freed from glacial till, gradually leach into the soil and give food to the plants and flavor to the drinking water.

The Return of Life

As the ice retreated, vegetation began to regain a foothold, pioneered by sedge, a solid grass-like plant still found on the highest ground. A warming climate allowed more temperate species to move northward until the land was covered with the mixed hardwood forest familiar to us today. Sugar maples, red maples and beech trees dominate where they enjoy moist soil conditions. Hickories and oaks grow in drier locations.

Late Archaic projectile point (Vermont Division for Historic Preservation)

Yellow birch and spruce appear on the hillsides, giving way to white birch, spruce and balsam fir at the higher elevations.

Humans moved north with the receding glacier. Hunting tools provide the earliest evidence of human occupation in the Slate Valley. Stone spear points from 11,000 years ago prove that migratory groups of Paleo-Indians moved into the area, following herds of mastodon and other huge animals along the edge of the melting glacier. As the climate warmed and megafauna disappeared, human inhabitants had to adjust their diet and lifestyle. Smaller, faster game required different tools and stalking strategies. Deposits of bone fragments, stone tools and projectile points dating to 5,000 B.C show how Archaic Indian people had adapted their tools to different prey and developed seasonal migratory patterns, hunting game in summer and fall before moving to sheltered winter villages.

In more recent times, as the practice of cultivating maize made its way into the Northeast, and Indian culture evolved, the Eastern Woodland Indians began to grow corn and other vegetables in addition to grooming their plots of plantain and other wild foods. Agriculture rooted them to a home base, a lifestyle that encouraged the production of pottery in addition to the working of skins and plant materials. When Europeans first arrived, a group of Mohican Indians, known locally as Horicons, lived in a village on meadowland located upstream from where the Owl Kill meets the Hoosic

Cartouche detail from, *A Map of the Inhabited Part of Canada: from the French Surveys with the Frontiers of New York and New England,* Claude Joseph Sauthier 1777, (Library of Congress)

River in White Creek. Another Indian village, in the Buskirk area, was known as Ty-o-shoke. These were Algonkian Indians, sharing a language, kinship ties and alliances with many of the Indian groups living in New England and eastern Canada.

The arrival of Europeans introduced new relationships and complicated old ones. Mohican people welcomed Dutch traders to their territory in the first decades of the seventeenth century. But their traditional enemies, the Mohawk, also wanted to trade with the Dutch. The ongoing inter-tribal struggle for territory intensified when it became about furs as well as food.

Mohican people were squeezed from the outside and threatened from within. New England settlers encroached from the east, Dutch from the south. Frequent wars with the Mohawk ate away at their hunting grounds, which had reached at least as far west as Schenectady. At the same time, strange, foreign diseases took a terrible toll on the population. As their numbers dwindled, natives of the Hoosic Valley formed defensive alliances with other Indian groups to the east and south. They also welcomed hundreds of refugees after King Philips's War in 1675. The Pequot sachem, Mawwehu, brought his people west over an ancient path through the mountains from New England and settled them in a village on the Pompanac Rivulet in the Taconic Hills of White Creek. The name of the place has since been corrupted to "Pumpkin Hook."

Mohawk Trail

The ancient path traced by Indians for centuries between the Hudson River Valley and the Connecticut Valley of Massachusetts is still known as the Mohawk Trail. But different users have used different names for the well-traveled path that continued north all the way to Canada. Whether referred to as the Great War Path or the Ticonderoga Trail, it was a thoroughfare for Indians intent on trading or raiding and later used by French, English and American colonial forces, and finally by early settlers scouting new prospects. The Slate Valley benefited hugely from the traffic that travelled this cross-country route.

King Brandt of the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy, from *Hoosac Valley: Its Legends and Its History*, Grace Greylock Niles, 1912

Struggles for Place

In the seventeenth century, European explorers, intent on empire building, arrived on North American shores. They made their way to this region using Native American water routes through the Saint Lawrence River and Lake Champlain from the north and up the Hudson River from the south. Each group of explorers and traders made alliances with the Indians along their route while having very little understanding of the existing power struggles unfolding between Native people, who were vying for their own place in this border territory.

Sails over the Horizon

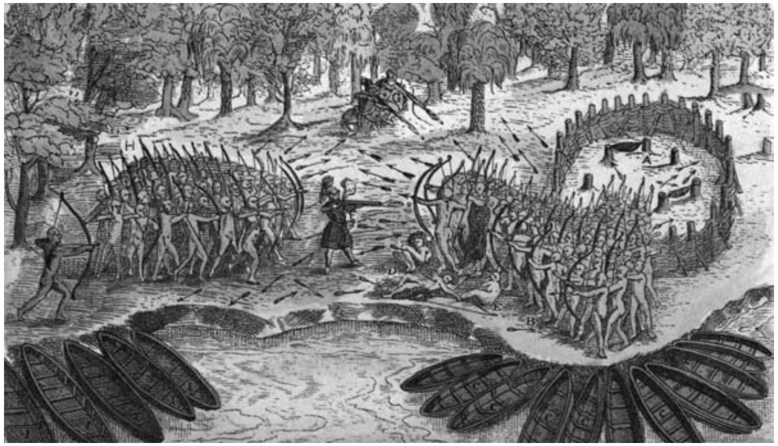
In July of 1609, Samuel de Champlain accompanied a party of Huron and Montaigne Indians from Canada up the lake that came to bear his name. At the southern

Sir Henry Hudson entering New York Bay by Edward Moran, c. 1898 (Library of Congress) end of his explorations on the lake, near what is now Fort Ticonderoga, they engaged a group of Iroquois in a deadly skirmish. Thus were laid battle lines that would reverberate for decades. The Abenakis of western Vermont frequently helped the French raid settlements in the Hudson and Connecticut River valleys, while Iroquois allied themselves with the British. Just a few weeks after that battle, Henry Hudson sailed the Dutch East India Company ship *Half Moon* up the river that now bears his name, having no idea that a French mariner had approached him from what would become French Canada. In between the furthest travels of both explorers lay this region, straddling the height of land between the Lake Champlain watershed and that of the Hudson River.

Indian place names often tell a story. Dionondehowa was first recorded in 1709 with the translation, "She opens the door for them," which could refer to the "Eastern Door" of the Iroquois Confederacy.

Indian place names are translated differently in different places. The spelling for the Mohican name of the Hoosic River changes to Hoosac when it crosses into Massachusetts, while the town and village names are Hoosick and Hoosick Falls.

The Dutch word for stream or river still survives in many place names. The river that flows into the town of Salem from Vermont, and empties into the Hudson opposite Schuylerville, is properly called the Batten Kill.



Champlain's battle with Iroquois Indians, 1609. (Fort Ticonderoga)

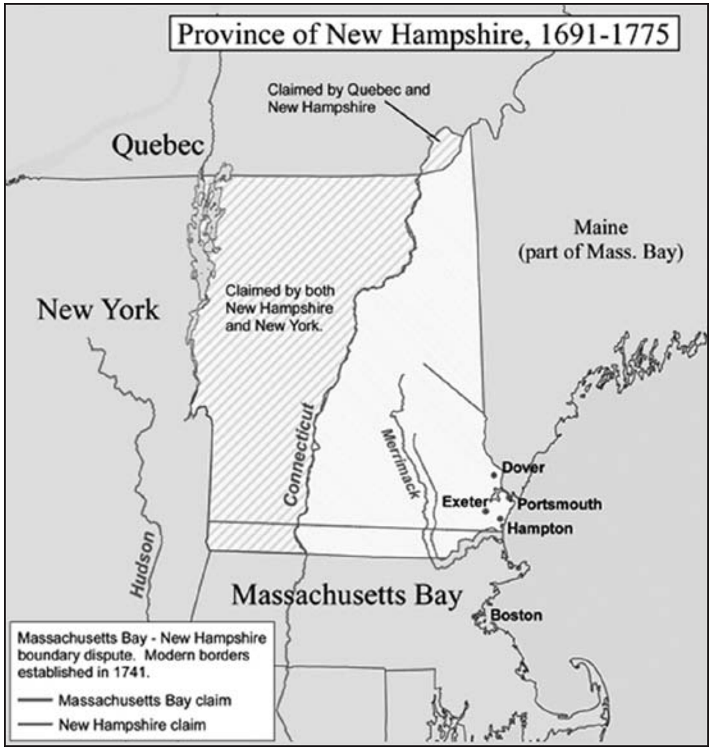
Border Battles

What the explorers claimed for their respective kings remained disputed territory for nearly two hundred years. Dutch governance gave way to British control when New Netherlands became New York in 1664. Not long afterwards, the first land patent in Hoosick went to a consortium of Dutch landowners. During periodic colonial wars between France and Great Britain, French raiding parties came through these valleys intent on destroying early Dutch and British settlements. Their Indian allies took captives back with them to Canada.

At the close of the French and Indian war, in the Treaty of Paris (1763), France ceded Canada to Britain, and the disputed land became prime real estate. The governor of New York granted land patents in Salem, Cambridge and White Creek, even before the treaty was signed. At the same time, the royal governor of New Hampshire, John Wentworth, granted land in what was known as "the Hampshire Grants." Many of Governor Wentworth's grants overlapped with those of New York.

Conflict over these territories intensified as the British Crown failed to either

Built and garrisoned in 1744 to protect frontier settlements during King George's War, Fort Massachusetts stood by the ancient Indian path through the Berkshire Hills. A raiding party of 700 French and Indians attacked the fort in August of 1746. The 22-man garrison fought them off for two days. The French destroyed every settlement in the Hoosick Valley on their return to Canada, with prisoners who remained in captivity for more than a year.



Map illustrating disputed area of Hampshire Controversy (Wikimedia Commons)

recognize, or invalidate, the New Hampshire grants. Despite opposition from New York's colonial government, New Hampshire grant holders continued to settle in the disputed territories, with populations reaching between twelve and thirteen thousand by 1774. They often harassed or drove out those who attempted to settle under New York titles. The border battle for land ownership was bitter and violent. By March of 1775, hopeful landowners on both slopes of the Green Mountains had joined forces to renounce the New York colonial administration and to appeal to the Crown to either be annexed to another colony or be allowed to form a new one. Months later, a war would begin that would take Britain out of the debate. In 1777, in the midst of the Revolutionary War, New Hampshire grantees formed the republic of Vermont, and then fought side by side with Yorkers to resist the British invasion

The Hampshire Grant border controversy simmered even as the Revolutionary War dragged on. Vermont became an independent Republic in 1777 and residents of Salem and nine other towns applied for inclusion in 1781. The following year, the communities withdrew their Vermont application and applied for readmission to New York state.

Brushed by War

The War for Independence touched the Slate Valley in brief but deadly skirmishes. Early in the war, Captain Joseph McCracken recruited men from Salem to serve under Colonel Goose Van Schaick in the First New York Regiments, whose companies were deployed to duties at outposts throughout New York state. Two years later, the war swept right through this part of eastern New York as the British invasion from Canada moved south towards Albany in late summer of 1777.

In July, British General John Burgoyne had seized Ticonderoga and Mount Independence on Lake Champlain, then moved his army south to Fort Edward on the Hudson River, where he began to worry about maintaining his supply line from Canada. Besides thousands of British Regulars, a sizable contingent of soldiers from Germany, as well as Canadians and Indians, Burgoyne also commanded several regiments of loyalist sympathizers, many of whom knew the area well. They had assured Burgoyne that he would find much-needed provisions, as well as horses, oxen and wagons and new "Tory" recruits as he moved through the countryside.

Headstone of Joshua Conkey in Salem's Revolutionary War. (Paul Hancock)

When Burgoyne learned that the Americans had provisions located in Bennington, Vermont, he ordered one of the German officers, Lieutenant Colonel Friedrich Baum, to lead a force of seven hundred men to seize the stores along with any wagons and draft animals he might find there. Baum's force consisted mainly of troops from his native province of Brunswick, all trained to fight on horseback but who had yet to find horses. They also spoke only German. Two loyalist outfits accompanied the detachment, along with a hundred or more Mohawk Indians. They followed the Continental Road, cut just a year before by Rebel troops, from the Hudson River to Cambridge, and a lesser track known as the Ondawa Trail on towards Bennington.

Local patriots sprang into action. Colonel John Williams, a Salem doctor who had enlisted with the American forces a year before, called out the militia. They quickly barricaded the unfinished White Creek Presbyterian Church with logs scavenged from the original church nearby, in what is now Shushan. Loyalist sympathizers burned the church and the barricades that are now remembered as "Fort Salem." Casualties from this and later Revolutionary War engagements lie buried in the old cemetery in the village of Salem.

Lieutenant Colonel Baum moved his men as quickly as possible past Cambridge and on to St. Croix (now North Hoosick), where they seized dozens of barrels of flour and salt from a grist mill. By then, the Rebel General John Stark had learned that they were coming and moved his New Hampshire Militia force to Bennington. A call to arms had brought in militia and volunteers from all over New England, so the Americans marched out to intercept Baum's force with

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Many Tories who fled to Canada at the start of the Revolution returned as guides for British raiding parties, whose destruction of crops, livestock, homes, barns and mills made New York frontier communities virtually uninhabitable during the summer of 1777.

When John Weir learned there were Indians scouting about near his Cambridge farm, he knew it meant British forces were getting close. He sent a farmhand to warn the Charlotte County militia and raced away to Vermont to find General Stark. Asa Fitch collected this story among many oral histories of events of the Revolution. Local folks like to call Weir "the Paul Revere of Washington County."

Sancoick Mill from *The Pictorial Field Book to the American Revolution* by Benson J. Lossing (Hoosick Township Historical Society)

Battle of Bennington by Alonzo Chappel, 1874 (U.S. National Archives and Records Administration) three times as many men. The two small armies met up at a bend in the Walloomsac River about five miles west of Bennington at the end of the day on August 14. Torrential rain kept them from fighting the following day, which gave Baum's men time to build defense works on a hill overlooking the bridge that spanned the river.

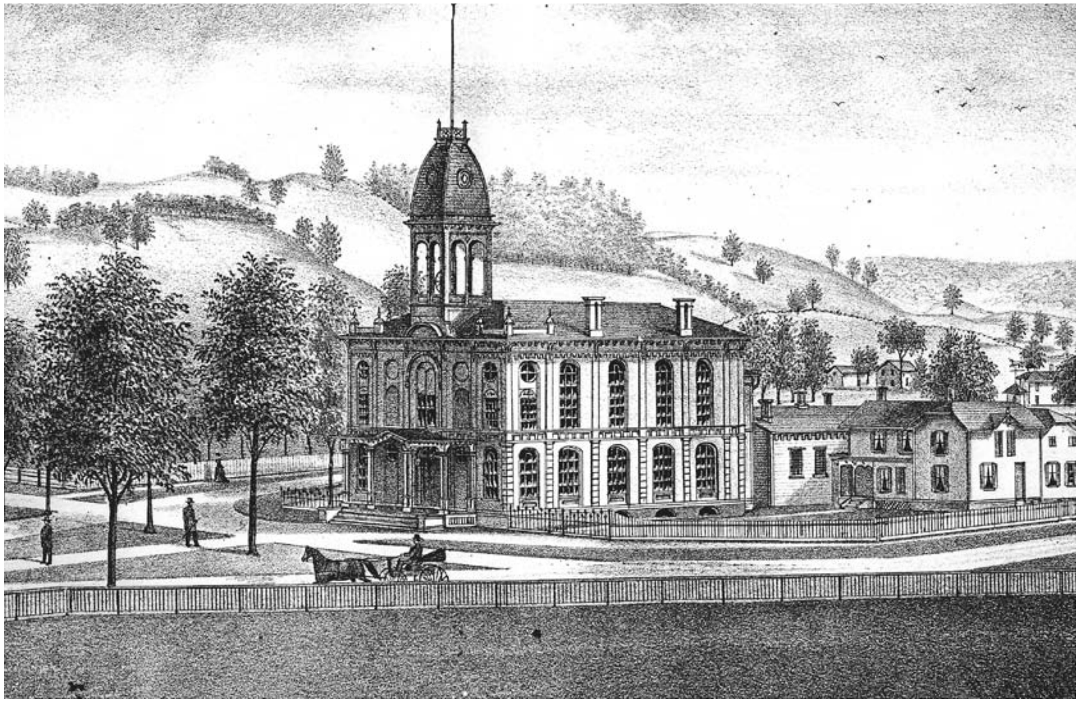
A Lakes to Locks PassagePort mobile app traces the entire route of the Baum expedition as a driving tour, from the British Army encampment on the Hudson River at Fort Miller through Cambridge and North Hoosick, culminating at the Bennington Battlefield State Historic Site. This audio narrative, supported with images and historical background, reveals the challenges that the British army faced during their invasion of hostile territory.

On the morning of August 16, General Stark deployed his forces to attack from all directions. Three regiments swept the German dragoons from their hilltop redoubt. Another crept up along a ravine to surprise a company of loyalists who thought they were safe inside their redoubt. Men recognized each other across the barricade and their pent-up antagonism fueled their fury. Stark led his unit in a frontal assault. Even the belated arrival of British reinforcements could not stem the tide of this definitive rout, now known as the Battle of Bennington.

Victory boosted the spirits of the hard-scrabble American army that had retreated so precipitously from Ticonderoga a month earlier. New enlistments from this Slate Valley region flooded into General Philip Schuyler's camp at Stillwater, New York. In September and October, many of the same men would fight in the battles at Saratoga, on the west bank of the Hudson River. General Burgoyne was forced to surrender his entire army on October 17, 1777, an event that many historians consider to be the "turning point of the American Revolution."

Building Communities

After the defeated British Army had been marched off to Massachusetts, people returned to the Slate Valley to rebuild their farms and communities. Dutch settlers returned to Hoosick from safe havens that they had sought out near Albany. The Scots-Irish Presbyterians, who had emigrated

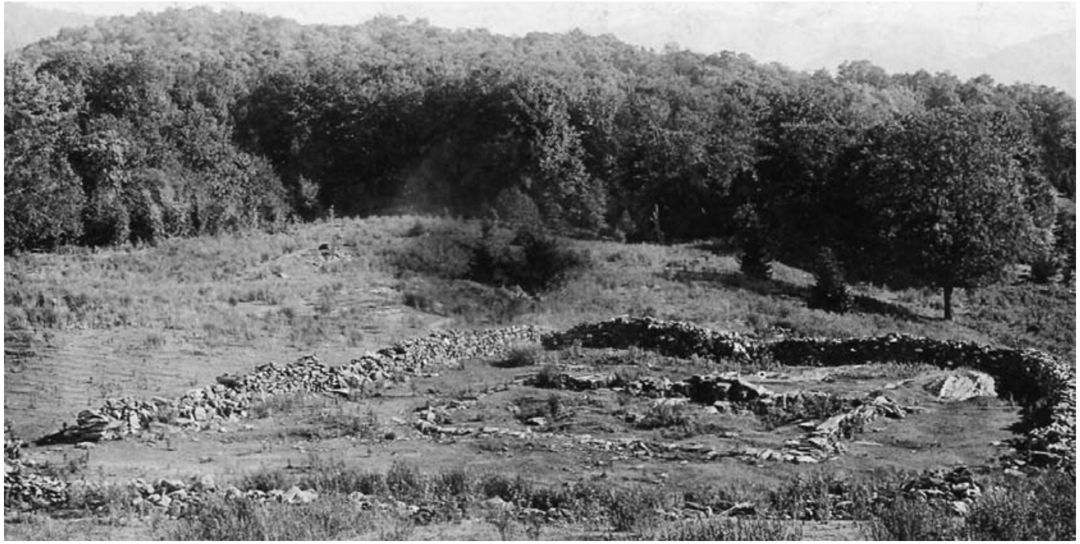


Washington County Courthouse and Jail, Salem, 1869. Lithograph by L. H. Everts and Co., Philadelphia, from *History of Washington County*, 1737-1878 by Crisfield Johnson (Salem Town Historian) just before the war, returned to "New Perth." Their neighbors, who had retreated to wait out the war in their former central Massachusetts towns, returned to White Creek. The families of Scottish veterans of the "Old French War," having taken refuge in nearby Jackson, returned to their homesteads in the Owl Kill valley of Cambridge.

All of these groups shared a common enemy, common hope for their new country and resentment of anything associated with England. So they welcomed the action of the New York State Legislature when it voted to change the name of Charlotte County (named for the wife of King George III) to Washington County in April of 1784.

The scattered settlements around Cambridge, White Creek and Hoosic went about the business of assembling a community, as did newcomers to Granville, which had not been occupied before the Revolution. Salem won the designation of county seat, promptly built a courthouse and an academy and hosted annual militia exercises. Cambridge did not develop a central village until a few decades later, because its population was clustered in several scattered settlements. Granville developed hamlets in three separate locations, the last of which became the central village of Granville.

A handsome brick Italianate Revival courthouse replaced the original Washington County Courthouse in Salem in 1869. It served the court until 1982 and other civil functions until 1993, when all county business moved to Hudson Falls. Since then, it has hosted community activities and organizations, including a visitor center for Lakes to Locks Passage.



Corral and barn foundation at Daniel Shays' settlement on Egg Mountain (Salem Town Historian)

Civil Disobedience

The British army left a path of desolation and destruction behind them. Few returning settlers had the resources to rebuild their ruined homes, mills and businesses from scratch. Post-war economics made their plight worse, as individual states began to seize property from farmers who could not pay taxes. A few destitute farmers in Massachusetts retaliated by raiding courthouses to prevent them from holding session. A famous insurrection took its name from the ringleader, Daniel Shays, who lost his farm in western Massachusetts during the proceedings. To escape capture, he fled to his sister's home near Salem. John Honeywood, principal of Washington Academy, raised a "schoolboy militia" to defend Salem courthouse, but Shays did not make trouble there. He was soon granted asylum by Vermont and settled on Egg Mountain, where he stayed until the 1810s.

Northern Turnpike

This fertile valley on the eastern edge of New York enjoyed a great boost to its prospects in 1799, when the New York State Legislature authorized construction of a turnpike to link the Capitol at Albany with northern New England. The Northern Turnpike would run from the east bank of the Hudson River, at Lansingburgh (now Troy), northeastward through Schaghticoke, Cambridge and Salem to Granville. Spurs would connect to Rutland, Vermont, and Whitehall, New York.

Public legislation dictated specifications for the turnpikes but did not provide funding. Sale of stock paid for construction and tolls maintained the road. The first twenty miles of the Northern Turnpike were completed by 1801: a road four rods (sixty-six feet) wide, twenty feet of which was faced with well-compacted stone or gravel and graded with an arch in the center to promote runoff.

The Northern Turnpike (Salem Town Historian)

Northern Turnpike mile marker in Salem, NY. Drawing by Clelia Lion

Tolls were set for vehicles and livestock, with collection booths located every ten miles. Milestones marked out the distance to Lansingburgh. A few of these still survive in place.

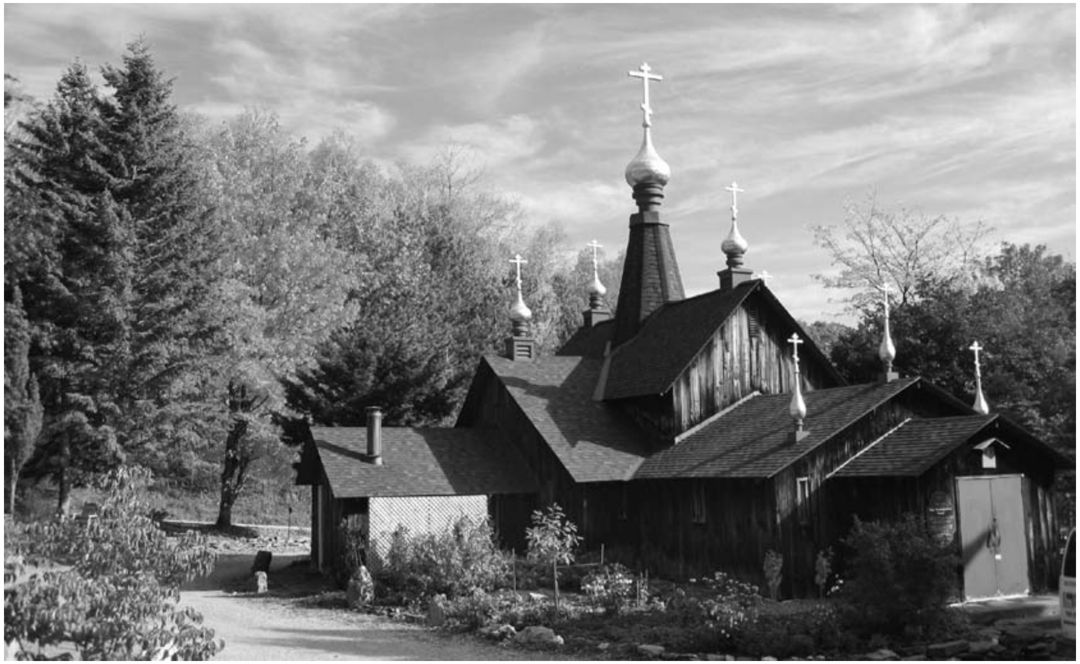
The Northern Turnpike fulfilled legislators' expectations for opening the region to settlement and providing a road that could carry farm wagons as well as herds of cattle, flocks of sheep and turkeys that made their way to market "on the hoof." But not everyone used the turnpike for long-distance travel. People on their way to church, or farmers hauling grain to a gristmill, were not required to pay the tolls. A road in Cambridge, still called "Shunpike Road," attests to the local practice of driving around through East Cambridge to avoid the toll. In Salem, where many farmers raised saddle horses, the hard surface of the turnpike served as a racetrack. In the 1820s, farmers bought maple saplings for two cents each, which they planted alongside the turnpike between Granville and Cambridge.

Expressions of Spirit

Town histories faithfully chronicle the organization of churches and the sequence of structures they built, lost, rebuilt and exchanged. But this region enjoyed a particularly lively and innovative spiritual life. Quakers came early to Cambridge, as did Presbyterians to White Creek. New England Presbyterians had their differences with the Scots-Irish immigrants, but they found common ground by compromising on the name Salem for their new home. Methodists established their churches soon after the

William Miller home. Photograph by Jomegat. (Wikimedia Commons)

Revolutionary War and enjoyed energetic leadership of the new faith. The millennial preaching of William Miller, in and around Washington County, formed the basis of the Adventist Church. Miller's prophetic proclamation of a date for the Second Coming of Christ, in 1843, along with the other new interpretations of Christian faith,



Transfiguration of Christ Temple at New Skete. Photograph by Brother Marc. (New Skete)

defined this region as the eastern border of the “burned-over district” of New York, where religious fervor swept the countryside for the first half of the nineteenth century.

More than a century later, a group of Byzantine Rite Franciscans found their way to this valley in search of a quiet place to pursue a monastic life embracing a balanced rhythm of prayer, work, community life and hospitality. East of Cambridge, near the Vermont border, the monks and nuns of New Skete, along with their Companions, have built a thriving monastic community offering worship and retreats for the public. Two popular product lines support the monastery. The nuns make award-winning cheesecakes in their bakery, while the monks produce dog biscuits and offer training seminars and publications for dog owners. A gift shop and gardens are open to the public.

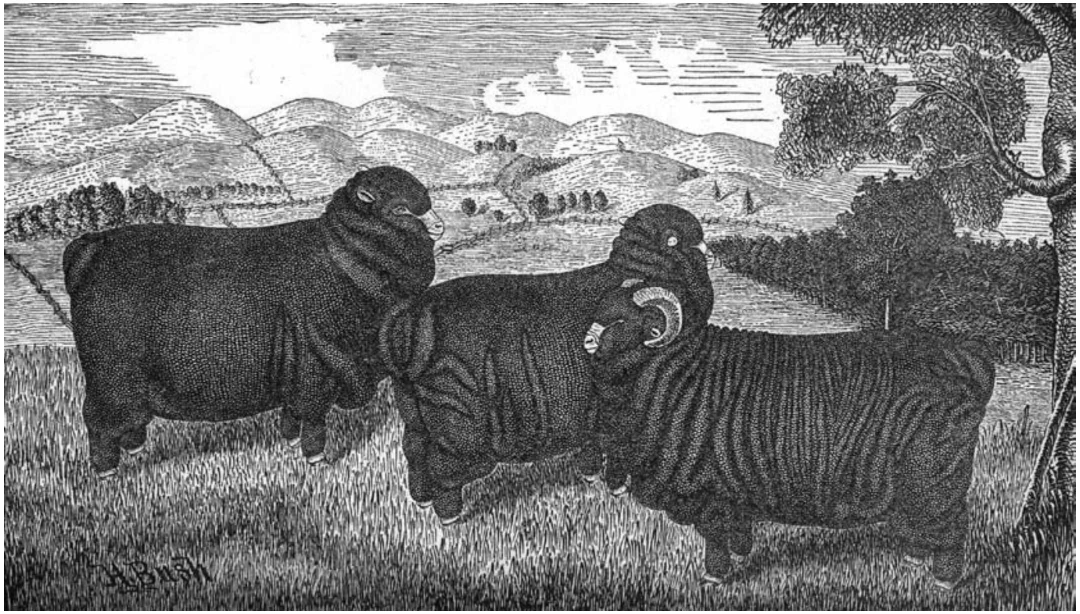
United Presbyterian Church, Salem, NY (Salem Town Historian)

Working the Land

Farm families returning after the Revolutionary War, and the new ones who streamed in from southern New York and New England, recreated the diversified farms they had grown up on, clearing land for pasture and tillage while raising grain crops, fruits, vegetables, and livestock for food and draft animals. As this nation of farmers began building their country, freedom wasn’t the only revolutionary idea at work in the land.

The revolution in agriculture gained momentum just after the turn of the nineteenth century, with the founding of the first agricultural improvement society in Massachusetts. Ten years later, Elkanah Watson held the first “agricultural fair” just across the state line in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. It was a very modest event. Watson displayed two sheep under a tree in the center of town. But these were not just any sheep. They were Merino sheep, imported from Spain, and their presence launched an interest in sheep breeding that would transform the country’s wool industry. A Salem farmer began developing a Merino herd that same year, 1810.

Merino sheep grew a long-stapled fleece that produced a very fine spun thread. Moreover, they could graze on rocky hillsides too steep for cattle pasture or cropland. A tariff on imported English wool enacted



Queen ewes from *The Register of Vermont Atwood Merino Sheep Club,* vol. 1, 1888 (Sheldon Museum, Middlebury, VT)

Natural fiber production still contributes substantially to family farms, supporting a growing "maker culture," as the market for fine woolen goods rewards an expanding cottage industry. Many farm families add value to their wool, angora, goat and alpaca crops by spinning, dying, felting and producing knitwear and woven goods.

by Congress in 1824, and doubled in 1828, greatly increased the price of domestic wool and encouraged farmers to expand their flocks. Early on, carding mills run by waterpower prepared wool for market by cleaning and combing the fleeces. By mid-century, there were a dozen woolen mills in Washington County producing woolen cloth.

Waterpower sites at all three Granville villages, Rexleigh and Shushan in the Town of Salem, and in Hoosick Falls powered many types of mills. Each community needed sawmills and a gristmill as well as a blacksmith. Many smithies harnessed waterpower to run their forge bellows and a trip-hammer in order to mechanically forge farm implements, edge tools and hardware. Flax mills ground flaxseed into linseed oil. Tanneries also located along streams for a ready supply of water to cure hides. Settlers from New England brought mechanic's skills with them and quickly "improved" the power possibilities by damming streams and building mill races to carry flowing water to and from their waterwheels.

Prosperous farmers and mechanics supported thriving villages, which in turn supported education and the arts in their communities. Washington Academy opened in Salem in 1780, offering instruction in the classics. Granville's benefactor, Franklin Pember, provided the village with a library and a natural history museum as well as an opera house. Shushan and Eagle Bridge also had opera houses, while Cambridge had two after Martin Hubbard built the second one in 1878.

Pember Museum of Natural History, Granville, NY (The Pember Museum)

Bartlett All-Steel Scythe Co., Rexleigh, NY (Salem Town Historian)


Barring slate. Photograph by Neil Rappaport. (Slate Valley Museum)

Bedrock Bonanza

For the first half of the nineteenth century, most mills, foundries and commercial enterprises employed ten or fewer workers. Slate bedrock, hidden beneath the surface, turned out to be the resource that would create the region's largest industry, one that would bring profound cultural, economic and physiographic changes to the region. Slate emerged as the greatest source of wealth in the region as production grew from a few thousand squares per year in the 1840s to more than four hundred thousand squares annually at its peak in 1908.

Slate slabs leaving a quarry. Photograph by Neil Rappaport. (Slate Valley Museum)

Squares of slate await shipment. Photograph by Neil Rappaport (Slate Valley Museum)

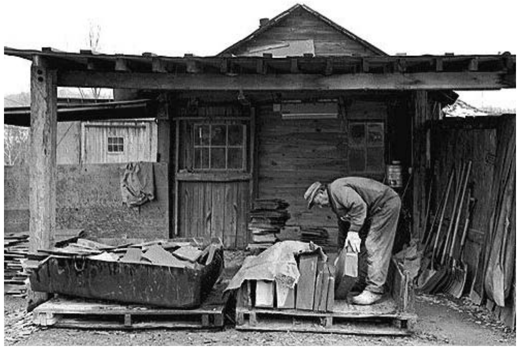
Quarrying Slate

Slate quarrying started on a small scale on isolated farms. Very few farmers quarried the rock themselves. More often, they leased the rights to other operators in exchange for a percentage of sales, measured in "squares" defined as the quantity needed to cover a hundred square feet of roof. Soon, every town along the New York-Vermont border had at least one major quarry, each one marked by a two-hundred-foot quarry stick.

Cables attached to the top of the quarry sticks were anchored at the far sides of the quarry with steel shafts about five inches in diameter driven into the rock. The cables supported rolling carriages that hoisted large slate slabs and buckets of waste slate up and out of the quarries. Slabs went to quarry shacks to begin the process of being shaped into roofing slates, flagstones, fireplace mantles or laundry sinks. Waste rock was piled in slag heaps at the edge of the quarry. Today, large quarry locations stand out in the landscape as huge piles of waste rock, or slag, that is slowly disappearing under encroaching vegetation.

Carriage and billy wheel. Photograph by Neil Rappaport. (Slate Valley Museum)

Neil Rappaport began his photographic study of life in the quarries one day in the early 1970s when he peered down into a quarry and heard the strains of "Saturday Afternoon at the Opera" coming from a radio in the lunchbox of a slate worker. Rappaport spent the next twenty years chronicling the hard and dangerous work of life in the quarries.



Splitting slate. Photograph by Neil Rappaport. (Slate Valley Museum)

Working Slate

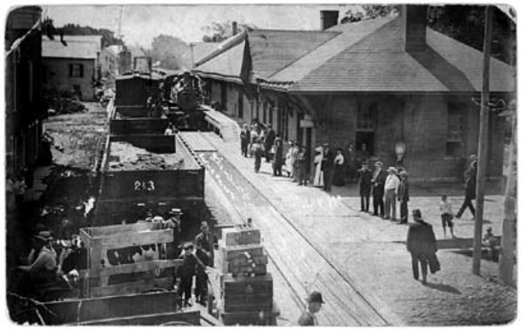
Highly skilled slate splitters and trimmers worked in the shack, splitting slate into thin pieces and then trimming each piece to a uniform size. The stratified nature of slate defined its importance as a roofing material. Splitters trained to read each piece of slate could identify how thickly or thinly they could successfully split a block or "book" of slate. Trimmers, first with hand-held tools and later with foot-operated or mechanized slate trimmers, took each newly split piece of slate and trimmed it to a uniform size so that slate could be boxed safely in squares and shipped nationally and internationally for roofing projects.

Moving Slate

The slate business could not grow beyond a local resource without transportation. The Champlain Canal, which opened in 1823, provided cheap water transportation. Freight on the canal could go by barge all the way to New York City, west to Buffalo on the Erie Canal (completed 1825) or north through Lake Champlain to Canada, via the Chambly Canal (1840). But the nearest port, at Smith's Basin, lay fifteen miles southwest of Granville over rolling hills and boggy valleys.

Marble companies in Rutland and Castleton also needed carriage for heavy bocks of stone. Plans begun in 1834 and halted by the financial panic of 1837 languished for a decade. Finally, in 1850, the Troy & Rutland Railway surveyed a route from Hoosick through Cambridge, Salem and Granville and on to connect with a Vermont segment ending in Rutland. The company headquarters was located in Salem,

Slate trucks (Slate Valley Museum)



Express train arriving at Granville Station (Slate Valley Museum)

at the halfway mark of the sixty-mile route. The northern section, known as the "Slate Pickers Run" through Granville, had eight different sidings for loading slate.

The Rutland and Washington Railroad, as it was called, struggled for the first few years until it became part of the Delaware & Hudson system in 1867. Trains could connect with the Rutland Road, which connected east to Boston and north to Montreal. At the south end of the line, trains could join the Troy and Boston line at Eagle Bridge.

The railroad had a huge impact on all of the Slate Valley communities. Salem realized the greatest benefit, thanks to its central location, where repair shops employed as many as two hundred men. The roundhouse had 13 stalls for servicing and repairing locomotives. Adjacent shops employed mechanics who built gondola cars and boxcars thirty-three-feet long and capable of carrying twenty-five tons.

South of Salem, the railroad connected the two centers of business in Cambridge, attracting a hotel and several major businesses to the gap between them. With the railroad acting as a "suture," White Creek and Cambridge incorporated as the village of Cambridge in 1866. The route through Hoosick Falls made it possible for manufacturer W. A. Wood to ship his reapers, mowers and harvesters. His expanding manufacturing complex came to dominate the village, filling all the space on both sides of the Hoosic River.

Immigrant Work Force

Thousands of European immigrants came to work in the quarries of the Slate Valley from 1850 through the 1920s. Workers from Wales, Ireland, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Yugoslavia, Italy and French Canada brought their families, customs and traditions. In doing so, they had a profound impact not only on the slate industry in America but also on the social structure of the towns in which they settled.

Workers from Wales, where quarrying had been a major industry for centuries, were

Slate workers outside quarry (Slate Valley Museum)

Slate mill workers c. 1900. (Poultney Historical Society)

the first to arrive. As skilled quarrymen, they dominated the labor force and often occupied the higher paying positions. Although many Welsh moved away after World War I and the Great Depression, their presence remains a strong element in the region. There are still many Welsh-American quarrymen and descendants. A large number of Irish immigrants also brought skills from working in the quarries of their homeland. Some Welsh and Irish workers achieved the status of wealthy owner-operators. While never as numerous as the Welsh, the Irish formed an important ethnic community in the valley.

A strained hierarchy of labor emerged in the Slate Valley as bands of Eastern European and Italian immigrants provided the poorly paid and unskilled labor of the quarries. Immigrants from the Carpatho-Rusyn region of Eastern Europe began to arrive at the slate quarries in the 1890s. Most were peasants, commonly called "Slovaks," who had only recently been freed from serfdom, and they filled the jobs that were the most dangerous and lowest paid. Unlike the Welsh and the Irish, the Slovaks did not speak English and were initially looked upon with suspicion. But as American-born Welsh and Irish left the quarries in the early twentieth century, the Slovaks replaced them, demonstrating their skills and commitment to the community. After World War II, Slovaks had purchased seventeen of the thirty quarries that remained open.

As Italians began to arrive in the Slate Valley at the beginning of the twentieth century, they in turn replaced Welsh and Irish quarry workers who preceded them. Mainly from southern Italy, they began a "chain" migration, drawing more families from the same locale. The earliest immigrants worked as unskilled laborers; later, some opened businesses that catered to the Italian-American community.

Culture and Religion

As slate quarrying physically transformed the landscape, the cultural traditions that the quarry workers brought with them transformed the Slate Valley communities. Welsh traditions, rich in music and poetry, were transferred intact, and the region became known for its outstanding choral groups and choirs. Welch Protestants held religious services in thirteen chapels, which also provided lessons in reading and writing to the children of Welsh workers.

Irish Roman Catholics were quick to adapt to life in the new country. They built their own churches and fraternal organizations, and took advantage of the American education system. Children and grandchildren of Irish immigrants often had careers as teachers in primary and secondary schools, and many attended colleges and universities. Many came to hold influential positions in local and national politics.

Initially, Slovak immigrants, mostly young men, hoped to make their fortunes in the slate quarries and return home to become yeomen farmers. Their low wages, as well as their lack of English, proved to be an obstacle to their ambitions. They were quick to organize fraternal societies that provided benefits to injured quarry workers and widows. First generation immigrants raised their children in the eastern Slovak dialects and in the rituals of the Byzantine Catholic Church. Slovaks celebrated religious holidays in an elaborate manner, with centuries-old rituals.

Like the Slovaks, Italian immigrants to the Slate Valley encountered a language barrier. First-generation Italian-Americans maintained the religious and social traditions of the old country: they practiced a folk-religiosity, a combination of Catholic orthodoxy and superstitious beliefs, and maintained a strong devotion to specific patron saints and Madonnas.

The Slate Valley attracted Jews at the turn of the nineteenth century, not to work in the slate quarries but as pack peddlers. Their descendants continued the family merchandizing tradition in shops that formed the backbone of village economies throughout the valley.

Byzantine Church (Slate Valley Museum)

Slovak immigrants in traditional Carpatho Rusyn Christmas garb (Slate Valley Museum)

Welsh women in traditional costume (Richard Clayton Collection)

Slate Car Wreck. 1916 (Slate Valley Museum)

Discord and Danger

So many people of different nationalities descending on a mainly Protestant (Yankee) agricultural landscape were bound to trigger antagonism and bigotry. The Protestant Welsh, along with the Yankees, initially looked upon the Catholic Irish with suspicion, but then English-speaking Welsh and Irish (along with the Yankees) treated the Slovaks and Italians with hostility. By the 1890s, anti-Semitic items began to appear in the press.

Low pay and poor working conditions led to regular eruptions between the young men without families who had to live in crowded boarding houses and tenements. Individuals fought among themselves, usually after being fueled with alcohol on payday. Local newspapers recorded numerous acts of violence resulting in injury or death, but the most volatile were the Slovaks or the "Huns" (Hungarians), as the newspapers called them, who had the menial jobs in the quarry pits.

Periods of boom and bust made the slate business difficult for owners and workers alike. Workers' relationships with quarry owners could be confrontational. Job instability, combined with discrepancies in wages for a work week of sixty hours or more, led to spasmodic attempts of workers to organize, form unions and strike. According to historian Gwilym Roberts, the New York and Vermont Slate Workers union formed in 1894 "not to promote strikes but for simple self-protection." Presumably, the provision that members must understand Welsh or English was intended to exclude non-English speaking workers of other ethnicities.

Through the union, workers eventually won their demand for a regular payday and the freedom to decline the deduction for medical care each month.

The deep and narrow quarries of the Slate Valley cost the lives of several hundred men between 1854 and 1915. Accidents caused by equipment—cables breaking, falls from cable hoists, failing brakes, blasting explosives, or broken straps on the horse powered sweep—were frequent causes of death and injury. Even in mills, where it was generally safer, hands were mangled in trimming machines. But what workers feared most was "fall of rock," as the papers described it, which became more frequent as quarries became deeper. Rocks or other objects could fall from the top, killing a single man, and slides of tons of rock and earth could bury many men at a time. For a

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The Slate Valley Museum in Granville presents the history of the slate industry in exhibits, photographs, quarry tours, and educational programs. An exhibit, "Heavy Lifting," details the hard work that men and machines do in the quarries. Complementing the museum's archival resources are the Welsh Heritage Collection at the Griswold Library of Green Mountain College in Poultney, Vermont, and the Slate History Trail at Lake Bomoseen State Park.

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period of sixty-six years, from 1849 to 1915, a workman or his survivor could not expect to collect anything from the employer for quarry or other accidents. Victims of accidents depended on the charity of the community or fraternal societies that were formed by immigrant groups such as the True Ivorites, a Welsh organization, or the Slovak SOKOL, which provided death benefits and funeral expenses for widows of quarry workers. When the first effective workman's compensation law was passed April 1, 1915, insurance company inspectors forced companies to comply with safety measures, and the number of quarry deaths dropped.

The Slate Industry Today

The demand for slate slacked off after World War II, as synthetic roofing materials offered cheaper alternatives. But the synthetics proved far less durable, lasting only decades, compared with the centuries of service from a slate roof. During the second half of the twentieth century, slate companies developed new markets and techniques for slitting slate more efficiently, cutting both labor and material costs. They also responded to a growing market for the use of slate in landscape and interior design. Approximately thirty quarries still operate in the region, producing flagstones and decorative gravels as well as kitchen countertops, sinks and floor tiles, fireplace mantels and other decorative elements for homes, offices and public buildings. Evergreen Slate provided slate for the Pentagon after the attack on September 11, 2001, while slate from Vermont Structural Slate Company enhances the Museum of Modern Art in New York City and the Boston Public Library.

The Slate Valley of New York and Vermont is the primary source for slate in North America, and the only place where the entire spectrum of slate colors is available. Consequently, many civic, educational and religious organizations, as well as preservation-minded architects, specify slate from this region in their designs.

Modern computer-programmable cutting equipment has replaced much of the work of quarrymen. Huge trucks and heavy machinery haul slate to the surface. Large diamond saws cut the blocks. But improved equipment has not dramatically changed the percentage of usable slate. Still, only about five percent of the rock quarried becomes usable product. Although many aspects of the industry are now mechanized, trimming and splitting of slate still depends on highly-skilled craftspeople who work by hand, bridging the historic industry with modern technology.

Circular saw cutting slate. Photograph by Neil Rappaport. (Slate Valley Museum)

Slate roofs can and should routinely last at least a century. In fact, 150 years is a reasonable expectation of a roof's longevity if the roof is properly constructed and maintained. In an industry where many roofing systems are lucky to last 20 or 30 years before needing replacement, the longevity of slate outweighs the initial cost.

Red slate, the rarest of all, comes only from quarries in and around Granville. Slate baron Frederick C. Sheldon built his mansion at 48 North Street in Granville using red slate for the exterior walls, a very unusual and costly choice of material.

Backhoe loading truck. (Slate Valley Museum)

J.B. Rice Seed Co. poster (Cambridge Historical Society)

Crops and Commerce

As farmers settled into the seasonal round of farming chores on their new land, they looked forward to a time when they could produce cash crops over and above the needs of their families. Farming had received no encouragement under British rule, and Americans were eager to improve both farming production and manufacturing.

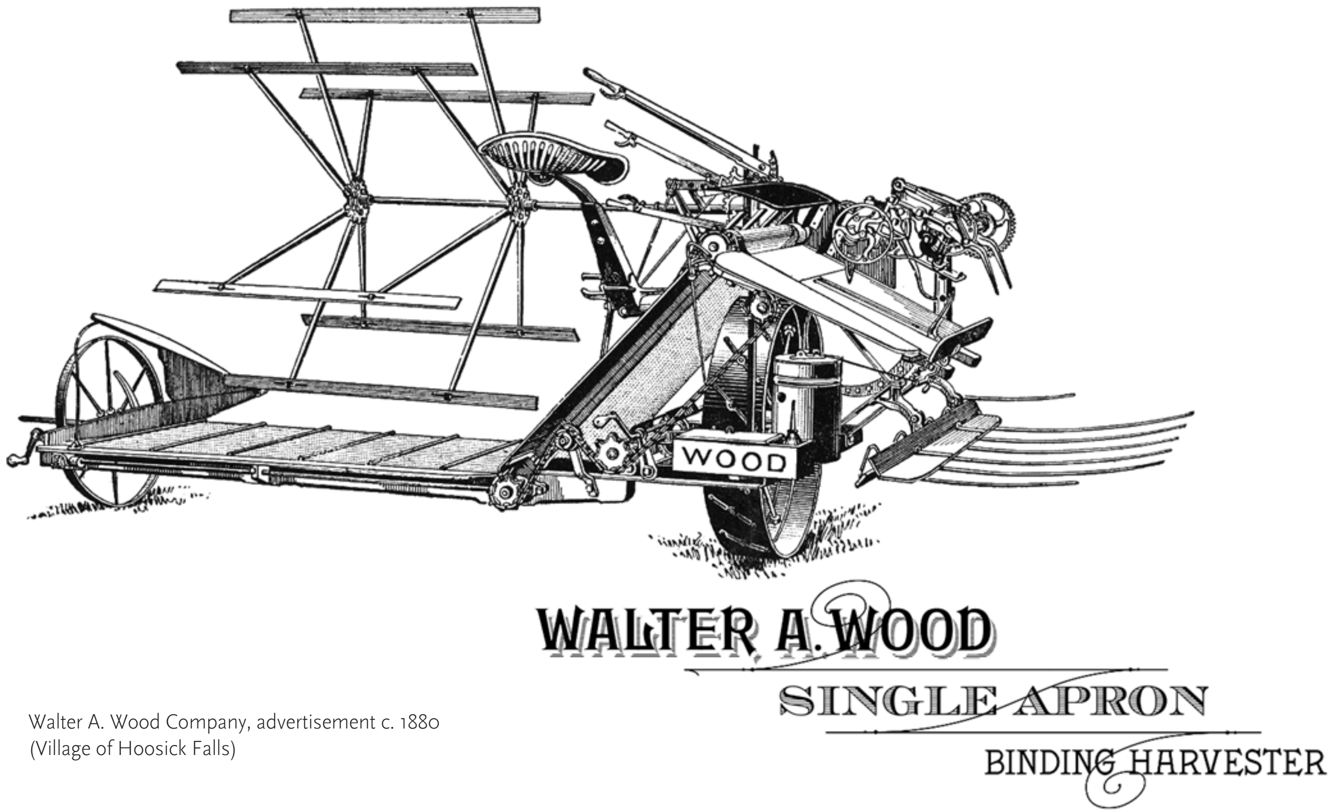
Improvement of farming methods became a patriotic mission, to demonstrate how well America could measure up to the Old World. Famers joined together in agricultural societies to learn how to improve their farming practices. The societies hosted agricultural fairs where they exhibited livestock, competed in plowing contests and earned prizes for wool and produce. County fairs became an economic engine, generating a market for seeds, tools and machinery. Mechanics flocked to fairs to demonstrate new equipment for farmers eager to find ways to do more work with fewer hands.

Filling the Seed Need

Farmers who moved into the Slate Valley brought their seed with them. A very few wealthy farmers purchased seed from England. But the majority saved seed from one year to the next. The first seed store opened in New York in 1806, catering to an urban population more interested in growing flowers than vegetables. But local growers in eastern New York soon offered alternatives.

Shakers began marketing seeds in the 1790s. Their business grew quickly and soon became the main income source for the Albany and New Lebanon Shaker families. In 1836, they printed a Gardener's Manual with instructions for cultivating multiple varieties of vegetables and herbs from their catalogue, which listed thirty herb and vegetable seeds, many of which came in several varieties. They offered five different varieties of turnips, which were grown to feed sheep and cattle. Dealers could purchase the manual for four cents and resell it for six, or simply keep a reference copy to inform their customers.

Crosby Seed Company started up in Coila in 1816, just a mile east of Cambridge Village. Twenty years later, in the mid-1830s, R. Niles Rice began a seed business in Salem, peddling seed around Washington County. The Rice Seed Company consolidated with Crosby's in 1844 and moved to Cambridge. The business grew quickly, with markets throughout New England, the Mid-Atlantic, and Southern states. Growers in Illinois supplied seed to Midwestern states. Rice Seed Company bred choice vegetables, earning a reputation, especially, for tomatoes and "perfect" sweet corn. By 1888, Rice Seed Company had become the second largest seed company in the world, employing 200 workers. Rice took advantage of the



Walter A. Wood Company, advertisement c. 1880
(Village of Hoosick Falls)

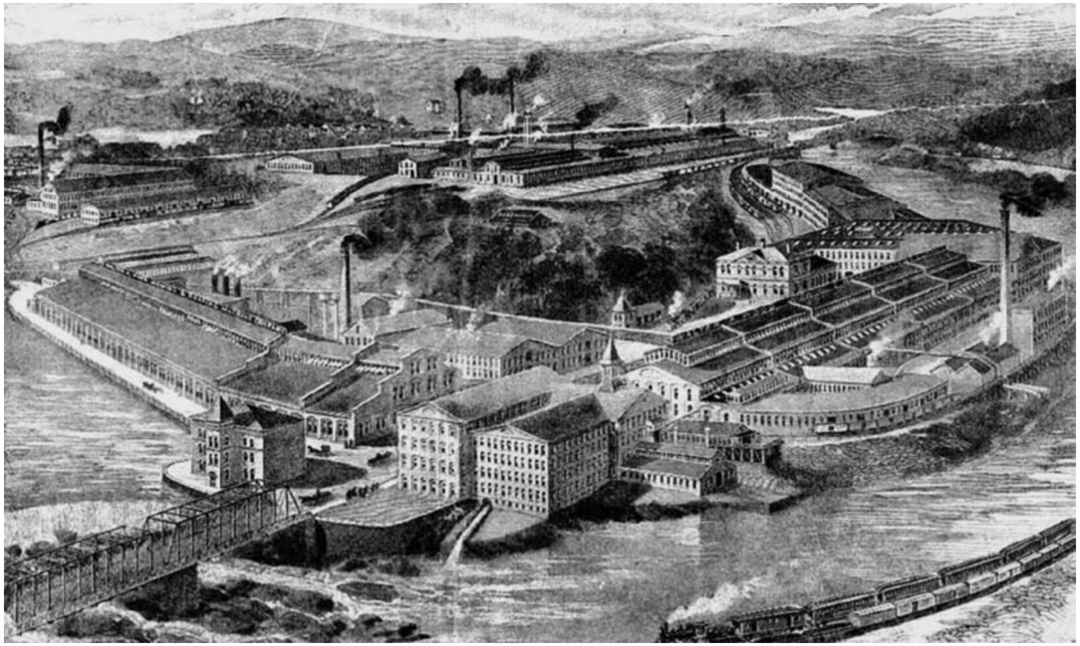
revolution in chromolithography to create colorful, engaging advertisements and seed packets printed with sentimental illustrations of smiling young farmwives.

Rice Seed Company sold out to Asgrow in 1939, finally closing down in 1976, but that was not the end of the seed industry in Cambridge. Bentley Seeds, in business since 1975, grows flower seed. They guarantee their seed as entirely free from genetic modification. This family-owned business has found a niche marketing custom packets for fundraisers, party favors and gifts.

Farming Tools and Machinery

Farming comes with a built-in labor problem: the work is seasonal. Farmers needed the most help in the spring, with plowing and sowing, and again in late summer and fall with harvest. Most farms were family operations, struggling to move beyond subsistence. Debates raged in the agricultural press, and in stores and taverns, over the relative benefits of seasonal or full-time hired help. A choice for seasonal help bred a work force with high turnover; full-time help raised the cost of room and board higher than most farmers thought they could afford. Labor-saving machinery offered a promising solution.

Every community had a local blacksmith. And, likely, several millwrights or mechanics who understood the physics of turning water into power and using it to make tools.



Walter A. Wood Mowing and Reaping Machine Company, Hoosick, NY (Hoosick Township Historical Society)

Slate Valley mechanics made much of their living from forging and fixing the farmers' basic tools: plows, scythes and sickles, spades and shovels, axes and adzes. Several of them, mentioned below, made nationally significant contributions to the mechanization of agriculture.

The New World needed a new plow. Many people put their hands and minds to building a plow that would stand up to the rigors of farming the frontier. Westward migration onto the prairie added thick sod to the challenge. Jethro Wood, born in White Creek (now Shushan), acquired legendary status as the inventor of the first moldboard plow that was efficient, cheap and adapted to use on Eastern farms. He held patent rights from 1819 to 1848. Wood's plow had only the beam and handles made of wood. The share, moldboard, brace and part of the landslide were cast as one piece of iron. The cast edge of the share, which wore out most quickly, was easily replaceable.

Wood refined his plow design after moving to Montville, New York, at age 25. But another company manufactured plows in Cambridge later in the century. Beginning in 1885, H.H. Lovejoy produced Cambridge Steel Plows, noted for their light draft, durability and superior turning qualities. Advertisements assured readers that the plow "works equally well on level land or hillside." Lovejoy also sold harrows, cultivators, planters, hillers, gas engines, potato diggers, ensilage cutters and shredders.

At the end of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century, at Rexleigh in southeast Salem, the Bartlett All-Steel Scythe Company (see photograph on p.21) turned out scythes, grasshooks and other tools. Noah and Robert Wilcox operated trip-hammers that turned out scythes and other agricultural implements. March's Factory turned out scythes and grain cradles at the upper falls of the Walloomsac River.

In Hoosick Falls, at the southern end of the valley, Walter Abbot Wood converted a business in cast-iron plows and implement repair to machinery manufacture in 1852. Over the next four decades, W.A. Wood steadily increased production of farm machinery, primarily for sale in Europe. The plant burned to the ground twice during his lifetime, but, each time, was rebuilt and retooled to handle increased production. By the end of the nineteenth century, W.A. Wood was building its own version of standard industrial machines: a steel-frame two-wheeled mower, a sweep-rake reaper and a twine-binding harvester.

Tiashoke Farm, Cambridge, NY. Photograph by Lawrence White. (Agricultural Stewardship Association)

Celebrating the Landscape

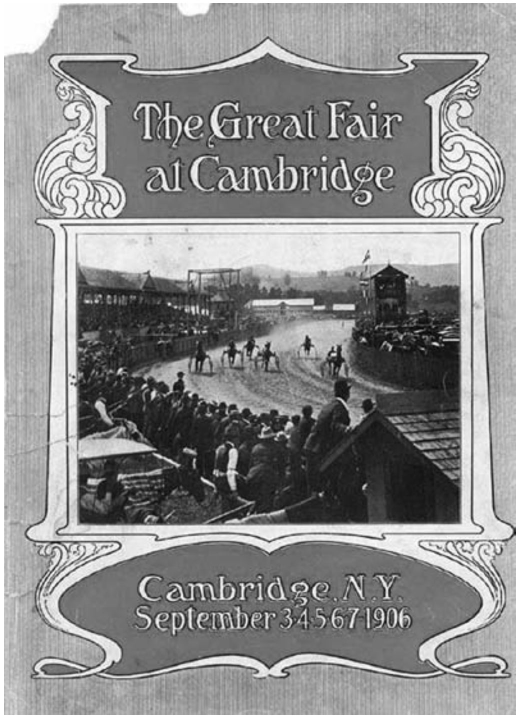
This rolling landscape, tucked between the Hudson River and the Taconic Mountain range, owes its charm as much to its hard-working farmers as to the pleasing undulations of its terrain. The valley has been blessed with people who value the land and have made an effort to take care of it. Their stewardship begins with supporting agriculture, because farming is the foundation on which the economy and culture have been built.

Farmers' Holidays

Support for farmers began very soon after the War of 1812 ended. Elkanah Watson's tireless lobbying for public support paid off in 1819 when the New York State Legislature appropriated $10,000 for agricultural societies and fairs. The same year, forty local farmers signed up as members of the Washington County Agricultural Society. Over the next year, they held a series of "wake up" meetings at seven public houses around the county to promote the idea of agricultural improvement.

The first "Farmer's Holiday" in Washington County took place at Major Andrew Freeman's hotel in Salem in September 1822. Plowing contests tested speed, endurance and ability to turn a consistent furrow. Prizes were awarded for livestock, "domestic manufactures" like fine wool cloth, and agricultural implements. But the aim of the event was to have a friendly gathering and exchange of ideas, as much as it was to compete. The fair moved about the county for the next few years. With renewed funding from New York state, in 1841 the fair expanded to a two-day event. Attendance increased steadily for twenty years when many able-bodied men went away to fight in the Civil War.

After the Civil War, attendance at the fair boomed. Howe & McNaughton Company in Salem offered land and agreed to build pens and exhibit buildings if the fair would use them for at least ten years. A decade later, the fair moved to Sandy Hill, at the western edge of the county, then back to Lake Lauderdale in 1883. J.B. Rice, the seed producer, bought out the fair in 1890 and moved it to the north edge of Cambridge.



Great Cambridge Fair poster (Cambridge Historical Society)

The Great Cambridge Fair grew into a major annual attraction. Special excursion trains carried fair-goers from Troy, Saratoga, North Adams and Rutland right into the fairgrounds. Small factories, such as the Salem Shirt Factory, closed for the week. Each year, the program published in the newspaper promised a new spectacle: one year there were acrobatic polar bears; another year, a visit from the "famous Strobel Airship." Horseracing reliably drew large crowds that filled the substantial grandstand. Today, the Washington County Fair, successor to the Cambridge Fair, has a permanent home in Easton, just west of Greenwich. The time-honored features of the county fair have not changed much in two hundred years. Contests, exhibits and special entertainments draw a crowd. But the remarkable diversity of livestock and "domestic manufactures" on exhibit demonstrate the innovative solutions for sustainable agriculture at work in the region. A separate "Fiber Fair" features sheep and other fiber-producers, accompanied by a dizzying array of beautiful hand-processed fleece, yarn, woven and felted cloth and knitwear.

Lamb at Ensign Brook Farm (Mary Jeanne Packer)

Local farmers support activities that contribute to a robust agricultural tourism economy. Farm stands and weekly farmer's markets make the local produce easily accessible while regional maple, cheese and fiber festivals encourage people to visit the farms to learn about the process and sample the products.

In the late 1800s, traveling circuses frequented rural communities, entertaining families and filling children with romantic dreams of "running off to join the circus." Fred Kerslake entertained such fantasies after seeing a show in Salem, not far from his family farm. He went on to create a very popular circus act of trained pigs that traveled the country during the 1890s. His pigs pushed each other in carriages, jumped hurdles, climbed ladders, played see-saw, and rolled barrels to peals of laughter and the delight of audiences. The Boston Herald reported, "Kerslake's pig circus is undoubtedly the most remarkable exhibition of animal sagacity that has ever been seen in Boston."

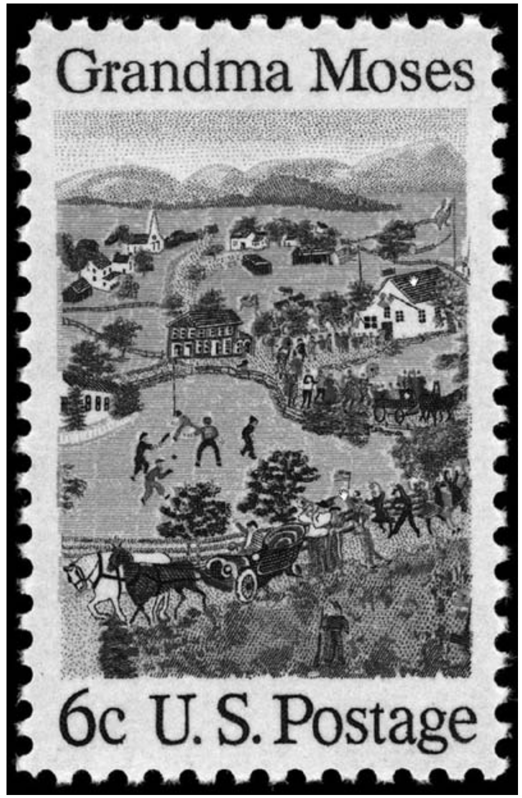
Kerslake pig ad from the *Buffalo Courier* (Lawrence P. Gooley, Bloated Toe Publishing)

Evoking the Spirit of Place

Trees have grown back over the rougher land in the north end of the valley, obscuring the raw piles of waste rock that mark the edges of slate quarries, but the Mettowee Valley presents as pleasing a prospect as it did when Professor Frank Childs painted the view from Slate Hill in (Middle) Granville in 1873. (See illustration on page 7.) More than a hundred people valued that view highly enough to pay five dollars for a full-color lithographic print of the painting, printed in Boston and sold by subscription through the Granville Post Office and the Rutland Herald. Many orders came in from people who had moved away and wanted a visual reminder of home. A copy of *The Picture of the Mettowee Valley* owned by the Old Fort Museum House is on display at the Washington County Historical Society in Fort Edward.

Further south in the valley, contemporary farms keep the landscape open, maintaining views that resonate with a nostalgic romanticism captured by one of America's most beloved artists, Grandma Moses (née Anna Mary Robertson). In her folksy paintings, known in art circles as "naïve art," Moses depicted her native countryside with a charming simplicity that, nevertheless, remained true to the lay of the landscape. She populated her compositions with country folks whose activities spoke of the community life that Americans already felt nostalgic for between the two World Wars. Her imagery came from crewel-work pictures she made before taking up painting. Grandma Moses' grave is located in Maple Grove Cemetery on Main Street in Hoosick Falls. Nearby, the Louis Miller Museum exhibits many of her personal belongings.

Norman Rockwell also drew on images from these communities in his cover illustrations for the *Saturday Evening Post*.



Grandma Moses, 1969 (National Postal Museum)

The Georgi Museum (Town of Salem)

When he moved to Arlington, Vermont, just north of Bennington, in 1939, his work began to reflect small-town life. Although most of his pictures depicted individuals going about their daily interactions, a few locations are recognizable, particularly buildings on Main Street in Cambridge in the scene of a couple and three children called *Walking to Church,* which appeared on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post,* April 4, 1953. Rockwell said of his art, “I was showing the America I knew and observed to others who might not have noticed.”

Slate Valley communities enjoy a lively contemporary art scene. Hubbard Hall in Cambridge carries on its historic opera house legacy of stage and music productions, enhanced by arts and crafts workshops and gallery exhibitions. The Georgi Museum in Shushan owns a collection of Renaissance paintings and European and Asian decorative arts. The collection is displayed in a charming country home surrounded by a park bordered by the Batten Kill. Salem Art Works has transformed a former dairy farm into an art center and sculpture park that offers artist residencies, exhibitions and workshops in glass, metalwork, pottery and painting. The wide open spaces where cows once grazed now inspire the creative explorations of today’s artists.

Preserving Land and Rural Life

Concern for the effects that industry and technology had on the land began with the first railroads. “We do not ride upon the railroad; it rides upon us,” wrote Henry David Thoreau, criticizing “progress” in the form of the steam-driven trains that he believed threatened to destroy the landscape and a simpler way of life.

George Perkins Marsh, who served as Vermont’s first Commissioner of Railroads as well as a Congressman, developed his

Hubbard Hall (Hubbard Hall)

Fly fishing near Shushan covered bridge. Photograph by Adriano Manocchia

understanding of the relationship between man and nature by studying the Batten Kill. Fly fishing was big business along this river, so a dramatic decline in water quality and fish populations in the 1850s raised serious concern in the Vermont Legislature. They enlisted Marsh to investigate. He identified the clear-cutting of lumber as the cause of "irreparable damage to the forests, waters, sandy areas, and wildlife that inhabit them." Marsh's findings in the Batten Kill Valley formed the basis for his groundbreaking book, *Man and Nature,* published in 1864, which earned him the reputation of America's first environmentalist.

Conservation practices promoted by Marsh continue to guide the efforts of local organizations as they work to mitigate environmental threats in the region. The Nature Conservancy, the Batten Kill Conservancy, and the Poultney-Mettowee Natural Resource Conservation District protect wetlands, forests and rare species in the Southern Lake Champlain watershed and along the rivers that flow into the Hudson River. They establish riparian zones along riverbanks, protect rare aquatic life, promote sound land management practices and protect endangered plant communities.

The Agricultural Stewardship Association acts as a driving force in the preservation of farmland as a means to preserve the character of the landscape. Since 1990, ASA has worked to protect farmland for its beauty and for the fresh foods, recreation, clean air and water that farms contribute to the quality of life—both for people who live here and for tourists who visit from far away. Using cooperative agreements like conservation easements and the purchase of development rights, this private, community-supported non-profit land trust has helped dozens of farm families pass their legacy on to the next generation.

Lady Slipper Orchids. Drawing by Clelia Lion

For three generations, the Moses Farm in White Creek has produced food on rich bottomland soil along the Hoosick River and the Owl Kill. Rich and Kathy Moses have worked with ASA to protect their property's farm and forestry characteristics with an agricultural conservation easement that permanently restricts the type of non-agricultural development that can occur on the land.

Access to Nature

The Slate Valley has been, and still is, a working landscape. The human impact on the land has not harmed the natural features that have drawn visitors here to “recreate” in a sublime natural environment. Styles of recreation have changed over the years, as have the accommodations available for visitors, but the same rivers, ponds, hills and valleys remain open and accessible.

Like other resort hotels catering to summer visitors at the turn of the twentieth century, the Warren Hotel in North Granville produced an extensive booklet detailing the delights awaiting guests. They could swim or row a boat to one of the islands in a nearby pond, fed by Washington Spring, which also provided pure, cold drinking water for the hotel. A stretch of the Mettowee River, flowing nearby, offered a “fine stretch for swimming and boating.” The hotel also boasted its own private sulfur spring, similar

The Warren Hotel (Washington County Historical Society)

Summer outing at Lake Lauderdale c. 1920 (Asa Fitch Historical Archives)

to those in Saratoga Springs. Guests could arrange to have the healthful waters shipped to them after they returned home.

The Batten Kill earned a reputation as a premier trout stream even before the Civil War. Thanks to the conservation efforts of river stewards throughout the valley, the river’s waters flow cold and clear today. Anglers still frequent the shaded riffles and pools of the upper river. Paddlers can put their canoes or kayaks in at car-top boat launches along the river. For folks who want to float in the river rather than on it, several outfitters rent tubes and offer a ride back upriver.

Dionondehowa Wildlife Sanctuary & School protects a small but very sensitive piece of the landscape alongside the Batten Kill in Shushan. This non-profit organization takes a joyful approach to teaching the values of stewardship, turning every activity into a learning opportunity.

The railroad that carried city folk to country resorts as well as squares of slate and loads of farm produce to distant markets stopped running in 1934. But portions of the rail bed still survive and have been cleared for recreational trails. Surveyors laid out rail lines along the most level route they could find, so these trails are excellent for cyclists, young families with strollers and cross-country skiers. The D&H Rail Trail owes its success, in large part, to the coordinated efforts of snowmobilers who made sure that the former railroad bridges remain usable. Two sections of trail have been developed along the New York–Vermont border. One section runs directly through downtown Granville; another route wends through the river valley and second-growth forest.

Franklin Tanner Pember turned his boyhood curiosity about the natural world into an enduring educational institution dedicated to understanding the environment. He spent a lifetime assembling a remarkable collection of mounted birds and mammals, bird nests and eggs, shells, insects, plants, rocks and minerals. In 1909, he and his wife, Ellen Wood Pember, founded the Pember Library and Museum in Granville. The collections today remain just as Pember arranged them: a fine example of display techniques found in the earliest museums of natural history. The Pember Museum also operates the Hebron Nature Preserve, 125 acres of forest and wetland on Black Creek. Seven nature trails are open to the public and a restored schoolhouse serves as nature center for students and family visitors.

Washington County from Hill. Photograph by Sara Kelly

Living a Land Ethic

Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of America's earliest and most beloved philosophers, wrote, "Visible distance, behind and before us, are our image of memory and hope." The value we place on vistas rests, in large part, on memory: on the patterns of fields and fencerows that have become familiar over many generations. Farmers keep the landscape open. Without their tillage of crops and pasturage of livestock, open fields and meadows fill in, first with brambles and shrubs, and then with trees.

For a time, in the latter part of the twentieth century, it appeared that farmers numbered among the endangered species here. Cherished vistas began to disappear as family farms struggled to survive. In the first decade of the new millennium, efforts on behalf of farmland conservation have combined with strategies for developing niche markets and specialty products that offer new promise for a sustainable working landscape. Farmers and artists can thrive in this creative economy, fueled by the region's expanding agricultural tourism offerings. Fiber and cheese festivals attract a growing audience, while farmers' markets and farm stands provide a reliable market for the growers of organic vegetables and grass-fed meat and the makers of artisan cheeses, lamb sausages and fine woolens who now enjoy a promising future.

Emerson pointed out, in the same essay, entitled "Nature," that any landscape is made up of many farms. "Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape." Indeed, we all own the landscape. But the work of the farmers keeps the vistas open. If we value the history, heritage and beauty that abide here, it falls to us to support the producers whose hard work provides us with these landscapes of hope.

Studebaker Carriage Company (Asa Fitch Historical Archives)

Telescope Folding Furniture catalog, 1929 (Telescope Casual Furniture)

Granville

In 1764, British officers who served in the French and Indian War were granted patents for over fifteen thousand acres of land along the Mettowee River. The initial settlers of Granville were predominately Quakers from New England who established gristmills, sawmills, blacksmith shops and woolen mills along the river that provided waterpower. Local families spun and wove wool and flax provided by nearby farms.

When slate quarrying began in the 1840s, the town experienced significant growth in population. By the 1850s, local slate companies were actively recruiting Welsh quarrymen. Soon Irish, Italian and Eastern European immigrants arrived in Granville to work the slate quarries.

The wealth and influence of the slate barons reflected the success of the slate industry. The thirty-four room, 10,000-square-foot Sheldon Mansion was built on a ten-acre village estate in 1906 by slate baron Frederick Sheldon. It is believed that this is the only building in the world constructed with red slate stonewalls. The Sheldon Mansion now operates as a B&B, and tours are offered by appointment.

Today, the Slate Valley Museum sits beside the Mettowee River in a reconstructed New World Dutch Barn, connected by a footbridge to the Pember Library and Natural History Museum. The Slate Valley Museum celebrates the history of the slate industry by providing exhibits and programs that tell the stories of the workers and their families through artifacts from the slate industry past and present, art exhibitions and lectures by noted scholars.

Nature

The Pember Museum of Natural History, 33 W. Main St. (518) 642-1515 www.pembermuseum.com

Pember Nature Preserve, Route 22 in Hebron (518) 642-1515 www.pembermuseum.com

History

Slate Valley Museum and Visitor Center, 17 Water St. (518) 642-1417 www.slatevalleymuseum.org

Hartford Museum (Civil War Enlistment Center), County Route 23 in Hartford (518) 632-9151 www.hartfordny.com

Recreation

Delaware & Hudson Rail Trail

Mettowee River trout fishing


Pedestrian bridge between Pember Museum and Library and Slate Valley Museum (Slate Valley Museum)

Troy & Rutland Railway roundhouse (Salem Town Historian)

Salem

The rolling land of this valley looked like paradise to families moving west from Pelham, Massachusetts, after the French and Indian War. Emigrating Scots Presbyterians thought so, too. One group called the place "White Creek," the other, "New Perth." Faced with a British invasion in 1777, the two factions banded together as the Charlotte County Militia to build Fort Salem and fight in the battles of Bennington and Saratoga. Ten years later, the leader of Shays' Rebellion hid out here with his former neighbors from Massachusetts. In 1788, the town incorporated under the name "Salem."

Salem's farmers prospered. They showed off their good fortune by building fashionable farmhouses whose grand Greek Revival pediments and pillars also proclaimed their pride in the classical origins of American democracy. The railroad came through in the mid-nineteenth century, replacing the Northern Turnpike and Champlain Canal as paths to market for farmers' grain, livestock and milk. Farming still keeps the land open, revealing a vista of storybook quality much appreciated by artists who live and work here.

Salem's hills and valleys invite active participation as well as contemplative pursuits. Fly fishing enthusiasts are keen to test their skills in the Batten Kill, one of the most famous trout streams in the country. Families swim, boat and tube in the river. Well-kept back roads winding over hills and through wooded vales have made this a destination for bicyclists looking for the varied terrain enjoyed by European racers.

History

The Historic Salem Courthouse,
58 E. Broadway (518) 854-7053
www.salemcourthouse.org

Shushan Covered Bridge Museum,
County Route 61 in Shushan
(518) 677-8251 or (518) 854-7220
www.salem-ny.com

Rexleigh Covered Bridge, Rexleigh Rd.
www.salem-ny.com/interest.html

Eagleville Covered Bridge, County Route 61 in Eagleville www.salem-ny.com/interest.html

Revolutionary War Cemetery, Archibald St.
www.salem-ny.com/revcem.html

Culture

Georgi Art Museum, Adam Ln. in Shushan
(518) 854-3773 www.thegeorgi.com

Salem Art Works, 19 Cary Ln. (518) 854-7674
www.salemartworks.com

Recreation

Tubing and fishing on the Batten Kill.

Main Street, Salem, NY. Photograph by Daniel Case

Cambridge

Settlers streaming into this broad fertile valley at the close of the French and Indian War recognized its potential as a farming paradise, but they didn't bargain for finding themselves on the road to a major battle just sixteen years later. Local militiamen marched down Main Street on their way to defend Bennington in 1777. Families hastily abandoned their farms as British troops gleaned all they could from fields and barns. Once the Revolutionary War was over, people returned to raise bountiful crops of flax, wool and potatoes.

J.B. Rice Seed Plant (Cambridge Historical Society)

Built to haul marble from Vermont and slate from the northern end of the county, the Rutland and Washington Railroad created a commercial focus for Cambridge. Rice Seed Company and H.H. Lovejoy and Son, makers of steel plows, located near the railroad, bridging the gap between rival hamlets and generating enough business to prompt Cambridge and White Creek to join together as a village in 1866. The railroad brought people, businesses and even entertainment to town. For years, a spur ran behind Hubbard Hall so that traveling troupes could easily unload their props.

Cambridge has eagerly embraced the arts for more than a century. Norman Rockwell captured the cozy neighborliness of Cambridge in his painting, *Walking to Church*. Hubbard Hall Opera House, built in 1878, competed with its cross-town rival, Ackley Hall, for decades. Beautifully restored a century later, Hubbard Hall's intimate dramatic space draws audiences from throughout the county and neighboring Vermont.

Nature

Batten Kill State Forest, Route 313
www.dec.ny.gov

History

Cambridge Historical Society and Museum, 12 Broad St. (518) 677-5232
www.cambridgenyhistoricalsociety.org

Cambridge Train Depot and Freight Yard, Washington St. (518) 677-2495
www.hubbardhall.org

Buskirk Covered Bridge, Turnpike Rd.

Culture

New Skete Monastery, 273 New Skete Lane
(518) 677-3928 www.newskete.org

Hubbard Hall, 25 E. Main St. (518) 677-2495
www.hubbardhall.org

Recreation

Lake Lauderdale County Park,
State Route 22 in Jackson (518) 746-2451
www.co.washington.ny.us

Fishing on the Hoosic River, access at Buskirk Covered Bridge

Kayaking, tubing, rafting and fly fishing on the Batten Kill

Cambridge Depot (Cambridge Historical Society)

Cambridge Balloon Festival. Photograph by Sara Kelly

Hoosick Falls

The town of Hoosick lies between the Taghkanick and Petersburgh mountain ranges. An Indian path known as the "Eastern Trail" followed the narrow valleys cut by the Hoosick and Walloomsac rivers, connecting the eastern Hudson Valley with a route through the Berkshires of western Massachusetts. During the Wilderness Wars of the early eighteenth century, French and Indian raiders used this "war path" to reach settlements in New England. After attacking Fort Massachusetts in 1746, a raiding party destroyed Dutch homesteads on their way back to Canada, which discouraged further settlement until after the Revolutionary War. The Battle of Bennington took place on the eastern edge of the town, on the banks of the Walloomsac River in August of 1777.

After the Revolutionary War, the village of Hoosick Falls grew up around water-powered industries located near the falls: sawmills, flax mills, carding and fulling mills, and a distillery. Slate was extensively quarried in the Hoosick Falls area in the early nineteenth century. However, it was the Walter A. Wood Mowing and Reaping Machine Works, founded in 1852, that grew into the town's economic engine and gave it an international reputation as a manufacturing center of farm machinery.

In 1938, a New York City art collector found the paintings of Anna Mary Robertson Moses (1860-1961) displayed in a local pharmacy in Hoosick Falls. The following year, three of her works were included in an exhibition of self-taught artists at the Museum of Modern Art. Grandma Moses' scenes depict the landscape around Hoosick Falls where she spent much of her long life. She is buried in the town's Maple Grove cemetery. Exhibits on the life and story of Grandma Moses are on display at the Louis Miller Museum.

Wood Block (Hoosick Township Historical Society)

Nature

Hoosic River Greenway (413) 458-2742
www.hoorwa.org

Tibbits State Forest, Route 7 (518) 357-2234
www.dec.ny.gov

History

Louis Miller Museum, 166 Main St.
(518) 686-4682   www.hoosickhistory.com

Bennington Battlefield Historic Site,
Route 67 (518)686-7109 or (518) 279-1902
www.nysparks.com

Buskirk Covered Bridge, Turnpike Rd.

Culture

Grandma Moses' grave at the Maple Grove Cemetery, Main St.

Recreation

Fishing the Hoosic River

Kayaking the Walloomsac

Bennington Battlefield State Historic Site. Photograph by Paul Hancock

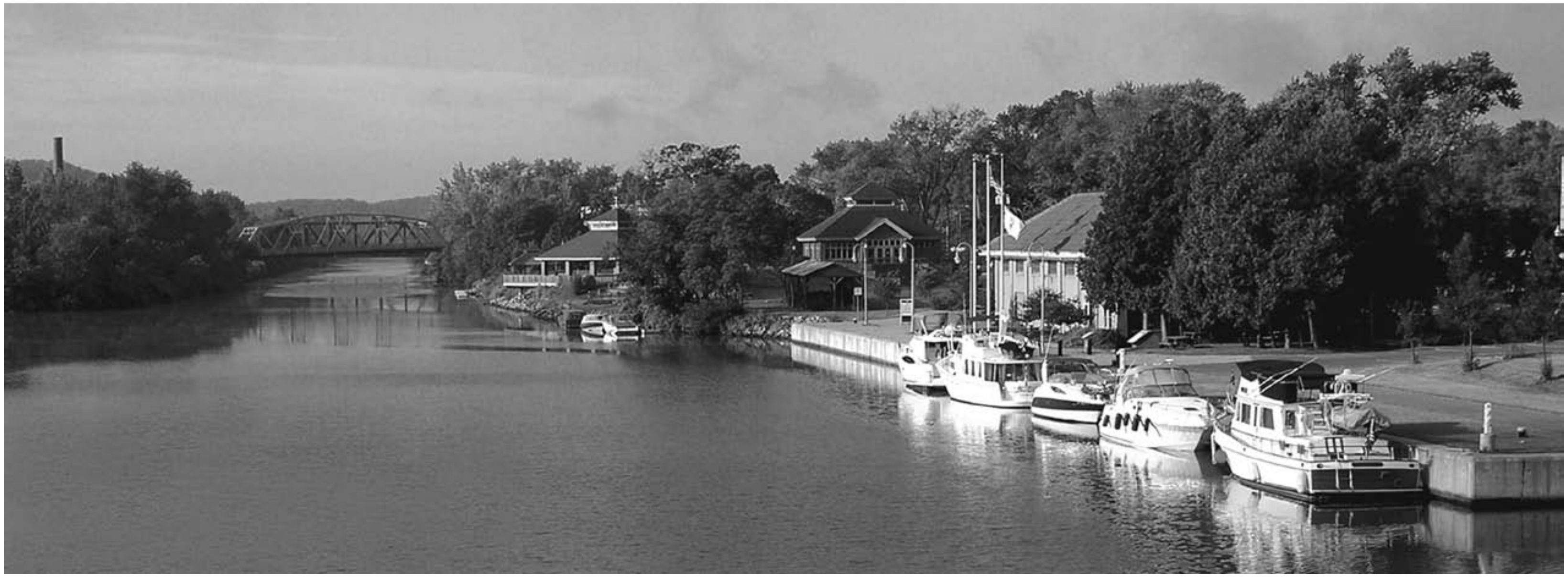
Walter A. Wood Company advertisement, c. 1875 (Gill Room at the Greenwich Library)

Champlain Canal Region

The Champlain Canal Region of Lakes to Locks Passage lies to the west of the Slate Valley Region, on the far side of the steeply-rolling foothills of the Taconic Mountain Range. From Whitehall to Fort Edward, the canal follows the ancient portage route used by Indians, fur traders and armies traveling between the Hudson River and Lake Champlain. The southern section parallels the Hudson River to Waterford, the eastern terminus of the Erie Canal. The Champlain Canal made it possible to ship the wealth of iron, lumber and farm produce from the Champlain Valley to factories and markets throughout New York.

The original Champlain Canal opened in 1823, with twenty-three locks and a hand-dug channel forty feet wide at the surface, twenty-eight feet wide at the base and four feet deep. After many improvements over the next hundred years, New York State enlarged the waterway into a Barge Canal, re-engineering the river into twelve sections (pools) with bigger locks and a deeper channel. Today, the Champlain Canal serves as a commercial and recreational waterway. Boaters can "lock through," or tie up to docks and canal walls all along the waterway. Travelers visit historic communities, ride or walk along the Champlain Canalway Trail and explore the old canal tow paths, viaducts and stone locks that are still visible in many places.

Every town along the 64-mile course of the canal reflects the prosperity brought by cheap transportation. In a companion volume in this guidebook series, learn about the history of towns begun under Dutch or British colonial rule, shaken by centuries of armed conflict, and shaped by their role as bustling ports and busy manufacturing centers.



Champlain Canal at Whitehall (NYS Canal Corporation)

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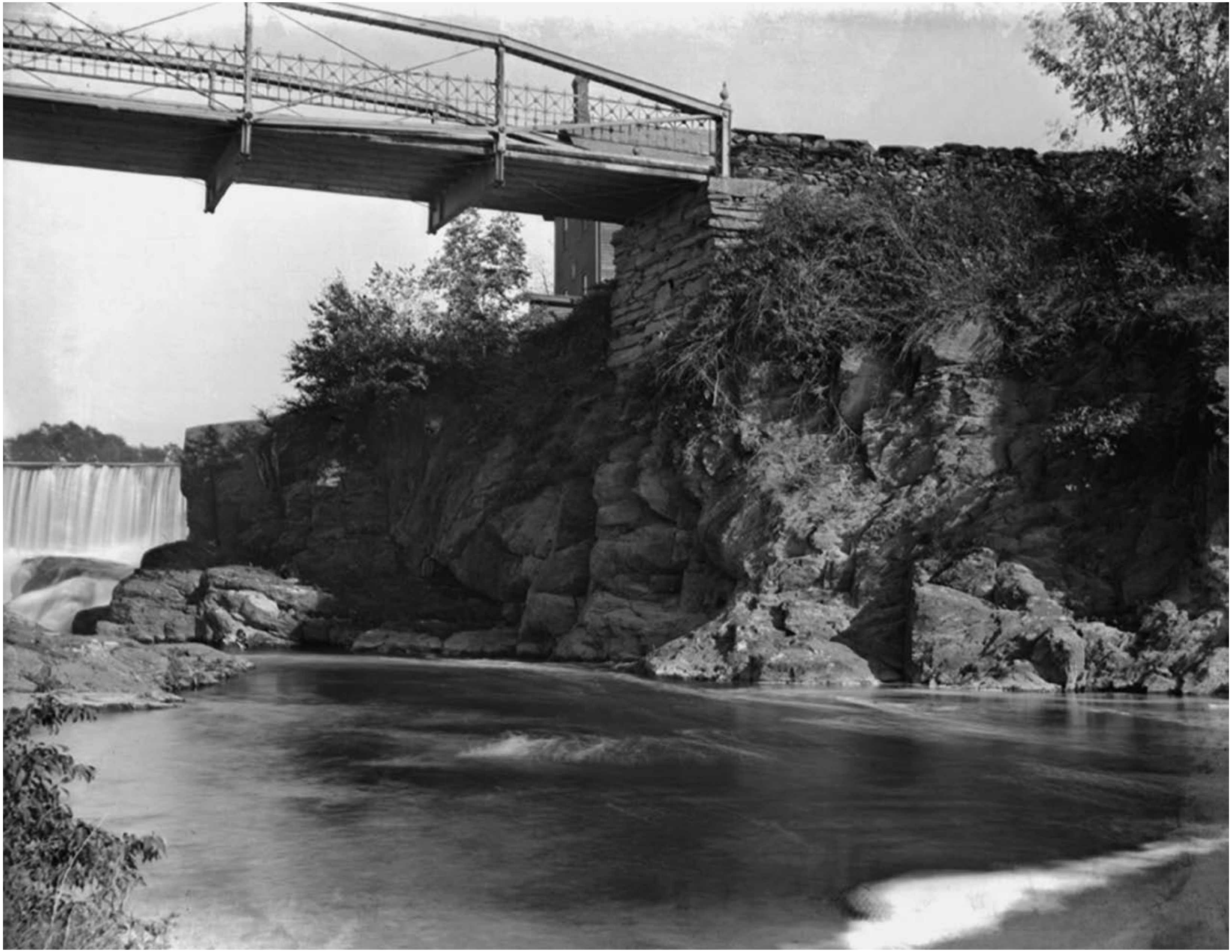
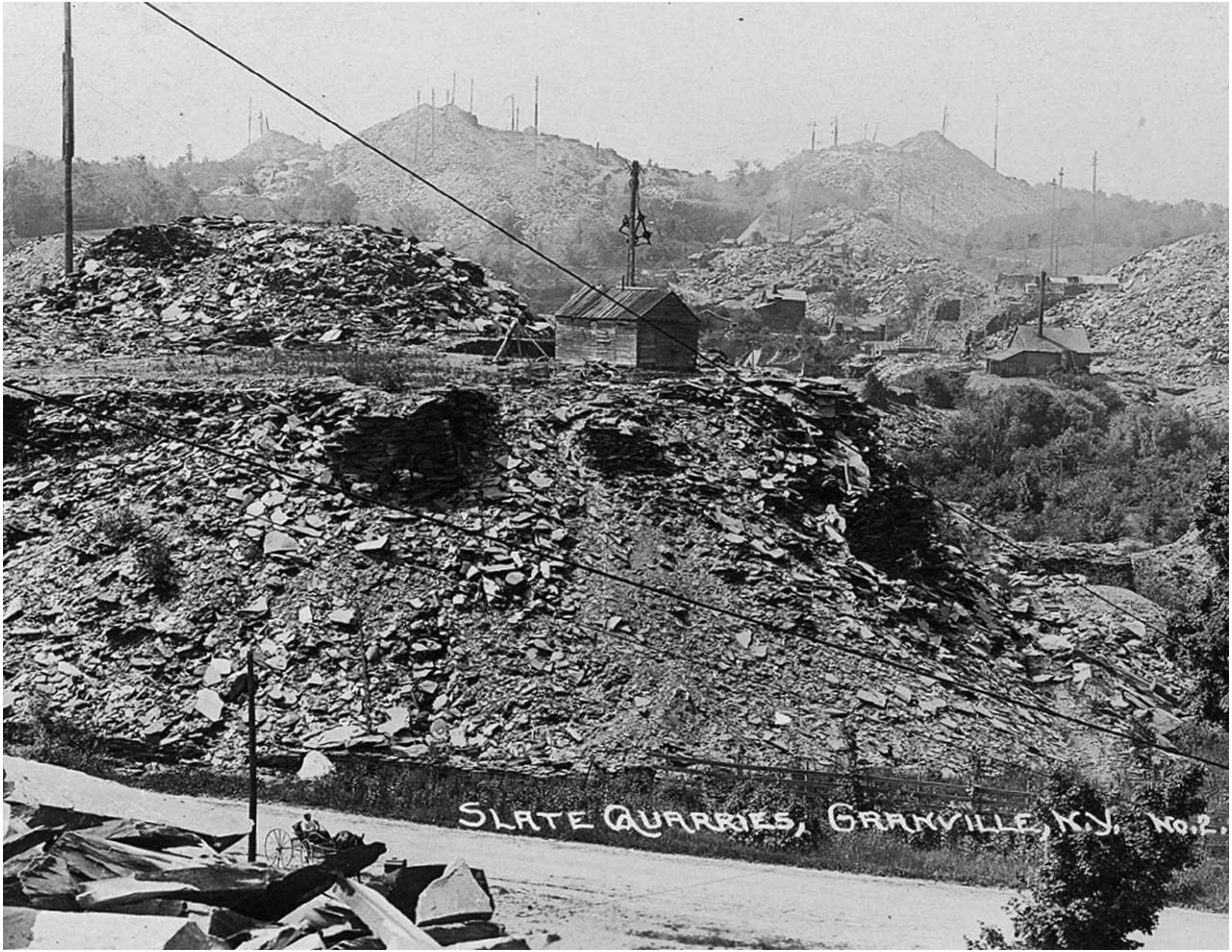


Mettowee River Gorge in Truthville, NY (New York State Museum)

Tanko Bros truck in “Heavy Lifting” exhibit (Slate Valley Museum)



Postcard showing scene from Granville, NY quarry, c. 1880. (Slate Valley Museum)