

# Newsletter

Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner

Volume 6, Number 3

Fall 2009

## The Peale Mastodent and Peale Museum

By Joseph Devine

For most of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, large bones were found in various locations in America. No one knew what these huge bones were. Native American legends were filled with stories of the great, mysterious creature, which became known as the Incognitum or Mammoth, due to its size. During and after American's War of Independence, Europeans spoke about how the "colonies" were inferior to Europe. The French naturalist Comte de Buffon wrote a series of published works known as the Theory of American Degeneracy, saying that American was "a land best suited for insects, reptiles, and feeble men."

What our young country needed was proof of an American animal larger than any found in Europe to silence America's critics. In early America, scientific work fell to the medical profession. Dr. James G. Graham, whose home in 1800 was near the covered bridge at Bruyn's Mills (now the hamlet of Wallkill), wrote to the editor of the Medical Repository about a great discovery. He reported the large number of bones found about three miles north of his home. The Shawangunk discovery caused a stir and Dr. Graham's letter was read at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, where Vice President Thomas Jefferson presided. Later, President Jefferson acquired the upper and lower jaw of the unknown animal for his personal collection.

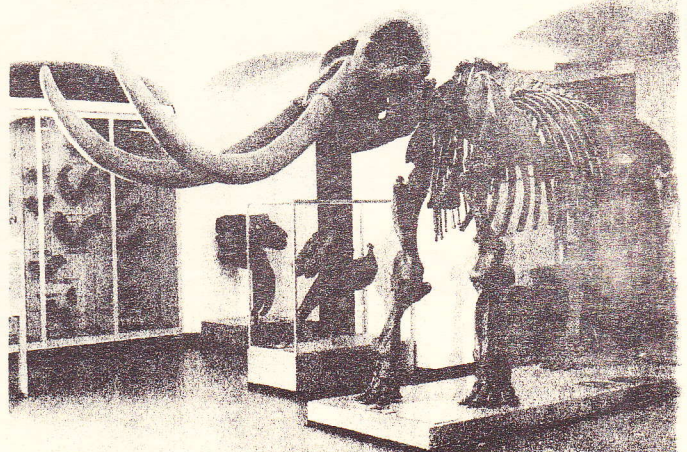
The Shawangunk discovery launched new enthusiasm for finding a complete Incognitum. In 1801, the American Philosophical Society funded a trip by famed portrait artist of the Founding Fathers turned scientist, Charles Willson Peale, to Orange County to investigate sites where large bones had been found. Accompanied by his son Rembrandt Peale, and others, Peale visited Newburgh, Montgomery, and Crawford where he bartered for existing bones and excavated for more. In all, the Peale expedition yielded enough bones to form two complete skeletons back in Philadelphia.

News of this great discovery raced through American and the Incognitum (or mammoth) became our country's first true national icon. The mammoth became a source of great pride for Americans. Knowledge of the mastodon was not confined solely within intellectual and scientific circles, however; the prehistoric mammal captured the American public's attention. The skeleton displayed by Peale's Philadelphia museum was among the preeminent curiosities of its day.

The Peale discovery was a huge step forward toward the emerging science of Paleontology. It caused greater acceptance of the theory of extinction at a time when it was considered heresy to mention that one of God's creatures could vanish from the earth. Most important, this great discovery debunked Buffon and emboldened a young American on the international stage. President Jefferson began immediately to negotiate with Napoleon for the Louisiana Territory. Three years after Peale's mammoth was found, Jefferson sent Lewis and Clark westward with the words: "Go west and find mammoths, dead or alive."

*Come hear Joseph Devine and Evan Galbraith speak on "The Discovery of Mastodonts in Shawangunk", October 7, 7:30 at the Wallkill Reformed Church*

The Peale Mastodent



## Officers

**Co-Presidents** Carolyn and  
Stewart Crowell

**Vice President** Libby Ross

**Recording Secretary**  
Doris Callan

**Corresponding Secretary**  
Betty Decker

**Treasurer** Bob Mooney

## Trustees

Freda Fenn  
Toni Gagan  
Alex Hoyt  
Al Meyer  
Mary Wright

## Publications

Libby Ross  
Doris Callan  
Freda Fenn  
Bob Mooney

## Standing Committees

**Programs and Education:**  
Freda Fenn

**Fund Raising:** Trustees

**Membership:** Bob Mooney

**Publicity:** Mary Wright

**Restoration/Bldg Maintenance:**  
Al Smiley

**Finance:** Al Meyer

**Archives and Collections:**  
Toni Gagan

**Publications:**  
Libby Ross

\* \* \* \*

## Letter from the Co-Presidents

Dear Members and Friends,

A lot of exciting activity has taken place since our last newsletter that really reflects our Society's commitment to not only the proper restoration of the Andries Dubois House, but also the cultural development of our community.

Many thanks to:

- Freda Fenn and all who participated in the Garden Tour
- Doris Callan and all who put together the Yard Sale at Popp's Pavillion
- Al Smiley and the committee for Borden Day
- Libby Ross and all for Windows on Art
- Special thanks to Bob Mooney for his program on Eugene Stevens which was one of the most enthusiastic and well-attended meetings we've ever had!

We hope to continue this enthusiasm into the Fall and the future. There is a great program schedule for the coming year. Be there. Bring a friend—we'll keep it short. History is alive in our community!

Thank you, Carolyn and Stewart Crowell



Presentation of quilt by women of New Hurley Church  
(see article on page 3)



The Phinney House in Wallkill, by Eugene Stevens  
(see article, p. 3)

## Event Highlights

\*\*\***Wallkill Hook, Ladder and Hose Company**---On May 6, Chairman of the Board of Fire Commissioners Joe Kelly addressed a meeting of the Society at the Wallkill Firehouse. In the presence of shiny red fire engines, he described how the company responds to fires, road accidents, and other traumas in Wallkill. The Fire Department was initiated by civic minded men in response to a 1901 fire. In 1902, there were 22 calls/year; in 2009 so far, 265 calls, 80% triggered by car accidents. We owe thanks to the 52 dedicated volunteers who serve our community.

\*\*\*On June 3, Historical Society members visited the **Gomez Mill House Museum**, the oldest standing Jewish dwelling in North America. The beautiful stone block house with Dutch colonial and other additions, was founded as a trading post in 1714 by Luis Moses Gomez. The house was also home to Wolfert Acker, patriot, William Armstrong, world traveler and writer, Dard Hunter, Arts and Crafts printer, and social activist Martha Gruening. Direct descendants purchased the house as a memorial to Gomez. The house has been on the national register of historic places since 1973.

- In a special presentation at the Gomez House, **Ruth Dylewski** and **Peg Cleveland** presented a quilt made by women from the New Hurley Church in the 1970s, depicting local landmarks, such as the Andries Dubois House and the Galeville Bridge. (see photo on page 2)

\*\*\*June 27 was the date of the successful **Garden Tour** fundraiser (\$1500) for the Historical Society. Thanks to **Freda Fenn, Doris Callan, and Toni Gagan**, those who contributed sale plants, and especially to the gardeners who opened their lovely gardens to an enthusiastic public.

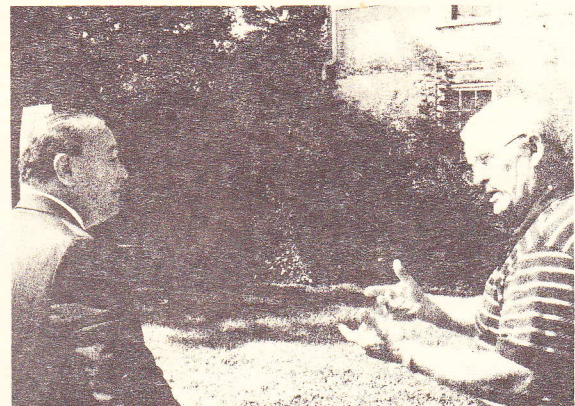
\*\*\*The **annual town-wide yard sale** was held Saturday, August 1st. Fifteen tables were rented and twelve tables were filled with generous donations from Historical Society members, friends and townspeople. Over \$600 was raised for DuBois House restoration.

\*\*\*On August 29, under auspices of the Historical Society, the John G. Borden Estate in Wallkill opened to the public for the annual **Borden Day** event. **Rodney Thompson, School of Practical Philosophy** caretaker of the Borden mansion and property, gave lectures on the Bordens and reminded visitors of the enormous impact the family had on Wallkill. Visitors viewed historical pictures, maps, documents and memorabilia in the long horse barn. Children took buggy rides to view cattle and working fields of

property today owned by the Hoyt family. Many thanks to the extraordinary efforts of **Al Smiley** and his hard-working committee.

\*\*\*On September 2, a large audience came to the Wallkill Reformed Church to view paintings by **Eugene Stevens (1868-1957)** that are now owned by local residents. Stevens was a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century artist who lived in Galeville from the 1920s to 1950s. Over 400 additional paintings have survived his death and by a circuitous route have landed in Los Angeles in the hands of a collector. **Robert Mooney** provided a biographical profile of Stevens; **Albert Shahinian**, a Hudson, NY gallery owner who represents Stevens' paintings on the East Coast, spoke, as did local residents who knew the artist. Stevens painted house and natural landmarks in Shawangunk that have since disappeared, and by so doing, documented a lost environment. Many thanks to residents who loaned their Stevens' paintings for the program. (see photo, page 2)

\*\*\*A second related event was sponsored by the Society called "**Windows on Art**" to participate in the 2009 Hudson Quadricentennial celebration. From September 5-27, a collaboration of art and business featured paintings by 23 local artists, 11 businesses in Wallkill and Gardiner, and 13 paintings by Eugene Stevens. We were pleased to highlight many artists among us, especially Eugene Stevens, and to call attention to businesses in our area who support the arts. "Windows on Art" began with a ceremony in which Assemblyman Frank Skartados and Town Supervisors John Valk and Joe Katz praised the effort to honor arts and local businesses. The committee responsible for the program consisted of **Libby Ross, Carolyn Crowell, Patti Eakin, Toni Gagan, and Freda Fenn.**



NYS Assemblyman Frank Skartados and President Stewart Crowell at the Andries Dubois House

**Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner  
2009 Fall Programs**

**Wednesday, October 7. The Discovery of Mastodons in Shawangunk. Joseph Devine and Evan Galbraith, Wallkill Reformed Church, 7:30 pm**

**Saturday, October 17. Six Centuries of Watercolors and Drawing at the New York Historical Society, Vassar Loeb Art Center, co-sponsored with Rhinebeck Historical Society, 1:30 p.m. Car-pool from Wallkill Reformed Church (12:30)**

**Monday, November 2. A show and tell of local items of historic interest. Gardiner Town Hall, 7:30 p.m.**

**Wednesday, December 2. Annual Christmas potluck/music. Wallkill Reformed Church, 6:00 p.m.**

**CALL FOR 2010 DUES**

Individual: \$ 20	Business: \$ 50
Family: \$ 30	Patron: \$ 100
Supporting: \$ 50	Benefactor \$ 250

**Our programs depend on your support. Please take a moment to pay your dues. Checks payable: Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner. P.O. Box 570, Wallkill, NY 12589**

\*\*\*

**BOOKS FOR SALE: One-Room Schools of the Town of Shawangunk 1800-1943, by Elaine Weed. \$20. Available at Wallkill Public Library or call 845-895-2903**

*Printed by Shawangunk Correctional Facility*

*J.T. Smith, Superintendent  
J.Nicotera, Instructor*

Libby & John Ross  
517 Dubois Road  
Wallkill, NY 12589

PERMIT NO. 481  
NEWBURGH NY

**PAID**

NONPROFIT ORG  
U.S. POSTAGE

**Historical Society of Shawangunk and Gardiner  
PO Box 570  
Wallkill NY 12589-0570**