



# Newsletter

Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner

Volume 9, Number 3

Fall 2012

## SLAVERY IN THE MID-HUDSON VALLEY

By Libby Antarsh Ross

Many northerners are shocked to learn that slavery was part of our Mid-Hudson Valley history, yet slaves were present from the earliest days. The Dutch West India Company, the first colonizer of the Hudson Valley, attempted to import agricultural laborers from Holland, but the experiment failed. Beginning in 1626, the Company imported slaves from Dutch colonies in Brazil and Africa - to clear land, build roads and towns, and work the fields. As private settlers bought land, they also purchased slaves for their farms in the absence of non-slave labor.

The English seized power in 1664; the first recorded purchase of African slaves for the Mid-Hudson Valley took place in 1674. By the late colonial period, most farms averaged two slaves, often limited because long winters made supporting many slaves an economic burden when they could not be maximally productive. In Shawangunk on today's Dubois Road, the 1790 Federal Census lists Dirck Roosa, Jr.'s farm with a household of 3 males, 1 female, and 3 slaves.

There are precious few first-person accounts of slavery in early Dutch and English history.. Rather the evidence is found in wills, inventories, tax assessments, the census, and newspapers. Much of our knowledge of local slavery comes through reading these documents. Slave ownership was considered morally right and economically necessary. Slaves were bought or sold in public auctions. When they ran away (a not uncommon occurrence), owners published descriptions in newspapers to identify them through their appearance, clothing, skills, and habits and this is how we learn about individual slaves.

Recovered runaway slaves were punished harshly. Additionally, slave owners feared slave revolts and the New York Legislature obliged by passing laws with even more severe punishment for defiant slaves who fought back in the name of personal freedom.

As Americans fought for their own freedom and liberties, the political environment changed in America

and the idea of slavery was seen in a new light as antithetical to individual rights and democracy. New York began moving slowly towards granting slaves more freedom.. Ulster County's population in 1790 numbered 26,390, including 2906 slaves. Almost every farmer had a slave; in fact, New York had the largest colonial slave population north of Maryland

*An Inventory of the Goods Chattels and Credits of Doctor James G. Graham Deceased taken this Ninth Day of the Month in the year 1815 by the subscribers agreeable to the Law in that case made and Provided*

one yoke oxen	80	one pleasure w'ch	30
one span w'ch	10	one w'ch	25
one black horse	70	the wood work in a Mill	25
one pair lame	40	one old wind mill	5
one young horse	60	twenty sheep and lambs	20
one horse sold	55	one black man Clo	10
one yearling colt	10	one Dr. horn hog	25
one hay stack & ground	100	one Dr. w'ch to be free	1
in which Cows at 21 Dec	120	one boy born free	50
in Beef Cows	50	one boy born w'ch	5
offers one span the other	40	one black woman w'ch	10
the milk Cows	8	one Dr. w'ch	150
one small Hog to bill	25	one black girl	25
and pig	6	two good plows and one horse	75
Waggons at 25	50	one Dr. w'ch	20
Wood	10	the black furniture	50
		two set of w'ch	20

Inventory of Assets: Dr. James Graham

Slavery was a recognized form of property and slaves between the ages of 12 and 50 were taxed as property, along with farm animals and goods. Ulster County landowners left behind wills and inventories of assets that minutely describe property for purposes of inheritance and taxes. Some slaves were freed at an owner's death, but far more were inherited by the heir. Possessions sold at auction by heirs or executors included slaves among the tangible assets. The 1815 Inventory of the Estate of physician James G. Graham who lived on the Bruyn Turnpike in Shawangunk lists eight slaves among goods, chattels, and credits inherited by his wife and heirs, along with their dollar values: one black man Moses to be free - \$1(cont.p.3)

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**Letter from the Co-Presidents**

Dear Members and Friends,

This year marks the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Shawangunk/Gardiner Historical Society. I am proud to say that my father-in-law, Addison Crowell, was a charter member. He and the other founding members had a commendable vision of preserving and promoting historical sensitivity in our community. That spirit and vision continue today as we work hard to restore and promote the Andries Dubois house, fulfill our mission by acquiring the historic Knights of Pythias Hall, and continue to present monthly programs of local historical interest. The Dubois House is open to the public each Saturday morning so that you can view our continuing efforts to restore the building and improve the grounds. Kudos to **Bob Mooney** for organizing and energizing this effort! Come join us by attending our next meeting, stopping by the Dubois House to “partner,” and by attending our gala Tea on November 3. Also join us in welcoming **Jim Malloy**, our newest Board member.

**Carolyn Crowell and Toni Gagan, Co-Presidents**

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**SPRING/SUMMER PROGRAMS**

On **May 2**, members were able to enjoy a presentation by a Cornell cooperative extension master gardener speaking on **Heirloom Plants**, plants that are both open-pollinated and grown in an earlier era.

On **May 14**, **William B. Rhodes**, author of **Ulster County New York: The Architectural History & Guide**, gave an illustrated talk at the Gardiner Town Hall, prodding us to take a new look at the architectural treasures around us.

On **June 6**, another beautiful and enjoyable early summer **Potluck** dinner was held on the **Andries DuBois** lawn.

On **June 23**, thanks to the tireless efforts of **Freda Fenn** and her committee, the annual plant sale at the **Andries DuBois** house netted \$450 to benefit the DuBois House restoration fund.

On **September 5**. In a program entitled, **Wallkill - Recollections of Yester Year—Part 1**, **Hal VanAken** presented a pictorial trip through the main streets of Wallkill showing buildings today and yesteryear based on Olive Burgess’s book “Home Town Memories” and Frank Mentz’s “Shawangunk Hearths.” There were additional comments and stories from **Ollie Burgess**, **Mary DuBois Wright**, **Elaine Weed** and **Iris Bellarosa**.

## MAJOR ANNOUNCEMENT

The Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner is proud to announce that it has acquired the Knights of Pythias Hall on Main Street in Wallkill. This was made possible through an agreement with the national organization of the Knights of Pythias which passed ownership through a quick claim deed.

The top floor contains artifacts from one hundred years of occupancy by the Wallkill branch of the Knights of Pythias to be arranged as a permanent exhibit for the public in its original building. Preserving hamlet history is an important part of the Historical Society mission. The street-level floor will be a meeting room for membership events and Board meetings, affording the Society privacy and convenience for its public and organizational functions.

For the first time in its history, the Historical Society will have a functional, practical center for business and administrative functions, distinct from the DuBois House which is being developed as a museum and future research center. Permanent files, desks, and working space on the ground floor will permit the Society to operate more efficiently to carry out the operations of a non-profit organization.

Acquiring the Pythias house also provides us with permanent, secure storage for artifacts, furniture, photographs, paintings, and documents in its possession, for which it has responsibility, and which it has been collecting for decades. It provides a single place of safekeeping for Historical Society possessions entrusted into its care, currently housed in homes and barns of boardmember caretakers. The collection is in process of being catalogued, so the timing is fortuitous. Housed together, these objects can be grouped appropriately as an early step to arranging archival conditions for their preservation.

The Historical Society has begun to ready the house for its future. On September 8, Society members picked through tons of trash for items that might be useful to the society or of value to be sold at a garage sale. Garbage and broken or damaged items were shoveled, barreled, bagged, or tossed into a huge outdoor dumpster to be taken to the dump. Thanks to **Bob Mooney, Libby Ross, Freda Fenn, Doris Callan, Carolyn Crowell, Hal VanAken, Stewart Crowell, Bill Wixon, Ish VanKeuren, and Alan White** for filling that dumpster. **Libby and Hal**

removed the slightly loud, red-velvet wallpaper from the front room and found a list of Knights' names written on the plaster wall. Each worker has stories of what they found. Thanks also to our neighbor **Sally**, who let us plug in an extension cord so that we had electricity for fan and lights to do our work.

**Andries DuBois House** The Restoration Committee met with Ken Betz and Ron Petito to evaluate how to save the front from further water damage through various roof and eave repair options. All options are expensive and some work must be delayed. Every Saturday, during our two hours of Open House, many Society members have been cleaning up the grounds around the house and setting up the One Room School House Exhibit. Please come visit us on Saturdays between 10 and noon.

*(continued from p. 1)* one black man - \$10, one black man (illegible) - \$250, one boy born free - \$50, one boy David sickly -\$8, one black woman Isabelle - \$10, one black woman Mary - \$150, and one black girl - \$25.

In 1799 NYS passed a series of gradual emancipation acts freeing children born after this date, but in reality changing their status to servants and extending servitude until age 25 (female) or age 28 (males). This increased restlessness and also the number of runaway slaves during this period, especially among young people. Emancipation was in the air and nearby states had already freed African-American slaves. By Act of the NYS Legislature, slavery was abolished in 1827, and slaves were emancipated a full year later. Owners were obliged to provide the means of support for their former slaves, so as not to place a burden upon the State. In fulfillment of this requirement, in April 1827, Derick Roosa, Jr. in Shawangunk deeded 45 acres of his farmland to "Charles Roosa (colored man) of Shawangunk in consideration of faithful services rendered and \$1."

**Sources:** *S. Stessin-Cohn, Missing Chapter: Untold Stories of the African-American Presence in the MidHudson Valley; A.J. Northrup, Slavery in New York; A Historical Sketch; M. Groth, Black White Relations in Dutchess County.*

**Historical Society of  
Shawangunk & Gardiner  
Fall 2012 Programs**

**Wednesday, October 3 - 7pm**  
**Reformed Church of Shawangunk: A History,**  
presented by **Karen Hansen** in the Church at  
1166 Hoagerburgh Road, Wallkill.

**Saturday, November 3, 2-4 p.m.**  
**Historical Society Benefit Tea.** \$15: limited  
seating. Call 895-3933 or 895-3986.  
Shawangunk Town Hall Community Room.

**Wednesday November 7 - 7 p.m. Part 2 :**  
**Wallkill - Recollections of Yester Year with Hal**  
**VanAken.**  
Shawangunk Town Hall Community Room.

**Wednesday, December 5 - 6 p.m. Annual**  
**Christmas PotLuck supper.** Wallkill HS Men's  
choral group. Shawangunk Town Hall Com.Room.

**REMEMBER YOUR 2012 DUES!**

Individual: \$20                      Business: \$50  
Family        \$30                      Patron:  
\$100  
Supporting: \$50                      Benefactor: \$250  
Checks payable to Historical Society of  
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