

# Newsletter

*Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner*

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## *The Wallkill Valley Railroad*

The Wallkill Valley Railway was built during the post-Civil War railroad boom. Ultimately it ran from Montgomery through Wallkill and Gardiner to Kingston, over 33 miles in length, with spurs running to other communities, and connections to trolleys and ferries. The railroad was a boon to Wallkill Valley farmers who had been sending produce the slow and uncertain way down to New York City via the Hudson River, but it also transformed life for ordinary people who used the train to travel to NYC, to hitch a ride or to hop a freight car to school in the next town; it also transported celebrities to the New Paltz station en route to the Mohonk Mountain House, already well known as a summer resort.

Construction of the railroad began in 1868, using young Irish immigrants and teams of horses. The trains were leased from the Erie Railway. The original Wallkill railroad station was built in 1866. Like many station houses on the line, the building was "in poor order and crudely furnished with benches," which "ought not to be." Regardless of the condition of passenger comforts, the railroad played an important role in the economic growth of Wallkill and Gardiner and the other towns along the line. The Gardiner station was opened in 1869, and like the Wallkill station, was built by Theodore V.W. Swift of Gardiner, a lumber dealer. Most fruit growers from Gardiner and Modena shipped out their fruit on the new rail line, and milk plants, including the Borden condensed milk plant which ran a creamery at Gardiner as well as in Wallkill, shipped dairy products to populations in and around New York City from the 1880s to the early 1930s. The railroad also brought in lumber, grain and other products to Wallkill and Gardiner.

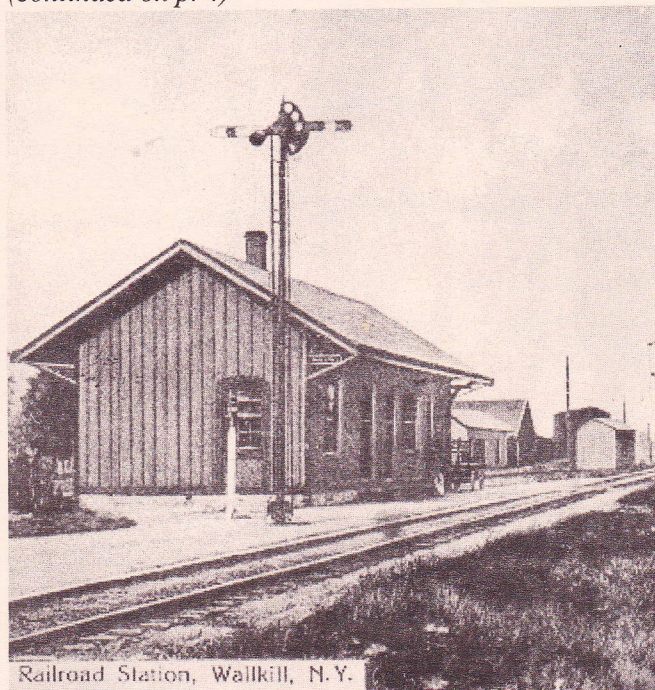
In 1877, the Wallkill Valley Railway reorganized, changed its name to the Wallkill Valley Railroad, and purchased its own rolling stock.

The Wallkill station was destroyed by fire probably about 1920 and the station agent Charles Bostwick

seriously injured trying to extinguish the fire. For about ten years after, a rail passenger car served as the station house. So much of the station had been damaged by the fire that a decision was made to build a new and smaller station.

With the increasing availability of cars and buses and the decline in farming in the 1920s and 1930s, passenger and freight service use dropped significantly in the agricultural towns along the railroad, including Shawangunk (Wallkill) and Gardiner. Passenger service ended in August 1937, although regular freight service continued for while.

*(continued on p. 4)*



Railroad Station, Wallkill, N.Y.



### Officers

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Stewart Crowell

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## Letter from the President

Dear Members and Friends,

I want to acknowledge gratefully the service of Loretta Miller and Karen Dale who are rotating off the Board in December. At the Annual Meeting on December 3, the Society membership elected Trustees Libby Ross, Doris Callan, Bob Mooney, Alex Hoyt, and Carol LeFevre to terms that will end December 2011. At the same meeting, Trustees elected officers who will serve a one year term (see sidebar). I am in the happy position of congratulating our new Co-Presidents Carolyn and Stewart Crowell. You may know the many ways the Crowells contribute to our town, and we are very fortunate that their commitment to Society goals have persuaded them to take on this new responsibility.

I also want to thank everyone who helped me to shepherd the Society through 2008 since I am relatively new to Wallkill; five years's residence is nothing compared to families who boast generational roots to Shawangunk and Gardiner. I respect the deep knowledge of family and community that is part and parcel of our Society's members ("She's my cousin on my father's side"; "he is the son of a former student of mine"; "I attended a one-room schoolhouse here."). I look forward to continuing my work with the Society. **Libby Ross**

P.S. Have you noticed the restoration of the 19<sup>th</sup> century brickwork on the front of the Andries DuBois House? We will paint it in the spring, but it looks beautiful in its own right.





## MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

**"From the Earth."** On September 3 at the Wallkill Reformed Church, **Ron Lambertson** gave a lively talk illustrated by decades of "finds" from "walking the fields." With his knowledgeable eye, he has discovered arrowheads, coins, pot chards, Civil War buttons, and Native American tools used to fashion weapons and domestic articles. Scouting the ground for knolls and protected places near rivers and streams, likely stopping places and shelters, he has found clear evidence of Native American activities. Once these artifacts were easily found, but over time fewer and fewer are in sight, though with each overflow of rivers or plowing of fields, new objects are uncovered to the educated eye. Lambertson demonstrated what most local residents know. We live upon layers of civilization and each generation leaves evidence for the next to discover.

**Jack Weed**, a Walker Valley resident, shared research on family genealogy at the Walker Valley Firehouse on October 1. Building on the work of an earlier relative, he talked to relatives, some of them complete strangers, using telephone, tape recorder, and computer software to gather information. Ancestry.com was the most helpful website for genealogy research, but he also consulted churches, historical societies, genealogical societies, family bibles, cemeteries, and history rooms of libraries.

Weed traced his family from Hartford, CT, finding surviving letters and government records of births, deaths and marriages. Jonas Weed arrived from Northampton shire, England in 1630 on the ship *Arabella*. Jobs along the Hudson River provided the reason for the family move from Connecticut to the Hudson Valley in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

"You will dig up things you never thought possible," commented Weed. "You will find things when you are not even looking." Weed described how he published his research using Heritagebooks.com, editing and promoting the book himself. "You do the work, they print," he said. Weed discovered fourteen generations of his family history, covering nine generations in his book.

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On October 22, students from the **Leo's Club of the Borden Middle School** planted tulips at the Andries DuBois House that will emerge in spring to celebrate



the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Henry Hudson's first voyage up the Hudson River. The tulips were donated by the Ulster County Quadricentennial Committee.

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**Gardiner Meeting.** On November 3, **Carlton Mabee**, Gardiner town historian, moderated a joint meeting of the Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner and the local Gardiner Historical Society, focusing on Gardiner history. He spoke of the role of the railroad in helping the farming community. When the railroad declined, so did the population of Gardiner; the hamlet was larger in the early 1900s than now, because of the loss of the railroad.

The meeting was enlivened by the personal recollections of long-time Gardiner residents. **Betty Moran**, whose family's Donahue Farm was located a few steps from the railroad, told of Larry the hobo who rode in with the railroad and returned each year for many years. Larry made himself very much at home, but never volunteered to help. However, he did entertain the family with stories. Many years ago **Harold Marks** took pictures of the Phillies Bridge, a covered bridge on Phillies Bridge Road, in all its glory, returning to take a last photograph after it fell into the Wallkill River in 1952. **Marks** remembered as a boy hitching his horse to peddle buttermilk on Sunday mornings. Lastly, **Peg Lotvin** told how the Gardiner library came into being. No one intended to start it, it just happened. People saved books, brought them together, made book shelves, library cards, and before you knew it, Gardiner had a library. Now she is retiring after 33 years service.

A large and appreciative audience enjoyed the meeting and the reception that followed.



(continued from p. 1) The old freight station, in back of the Wallkill passenger station featured a turntable that allowed trains and cars to make return trips until freight services ended in 1957. In 1965 the Wallkill railroad station and land around it were purchased by James Howell, a Wallkill feed and lumber dealer. The Gardiner station was occupied by Dolson's Shawangunk Sporting Goods.

In 1983-84, the tracks were pulled up for salvage. Today the "rail trail" in Wallkill and in Gardiner have taken on a new life, providing many happy hours of hiking, biking, and birdwatching for a new generation of Wallkill Valley residents.

References: Carleton Mabee, Listen to the Whistle, An Anecdotal History of the Wallkill Valley Railroad in Ulster and Orange Counties, New York, Purple Mountain Press, 1995

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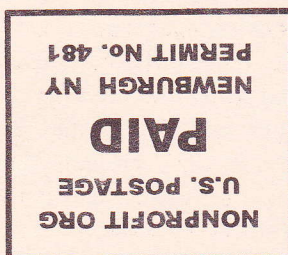
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## Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner

### Coming events - 2009

**Winter recess:**  
**no programs in January and February**

Among other activities this spring, the Historical Society is planning events to coordinate with Ulster County's Quadricentennial celebrations. The work of Shawangunk artists will be exhibited at businesses in Wallkill and Gardiner and our annual garden tour will be expanded to include visits to local artists's studios. Stay tuned for details.



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