

SPRING 2019

# THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY REVIEW

*A Journal of Regional Studies*

MARIST



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## From the Editors

While perhaps not at first apparent, the articles in this issue share a common theme—struggle. The Dutch colonists had to carve a home out of the New World wilderness. Two centuries later, descendants of the original inhabitants of a part of that world (which wasn't entirely wilderness after all) tried to reclaim their sovereignty. Just fifty years after that, women undertook a march from New York City to Albany to assert their right to vote and gain adherents for their cause. Finally, while the rise and fall of Albany's lumber district perhaps doesn't readily seem to fit the theme, here, too, a struggle took place to establish and maintain a community on and around it.

This latter essay underscores the essential role of technological innovation, a concept that leads us to a second underlying theme of this issue—progress. Sometimes welcome, sometimes not, for better or worse it is always unstoppable.



## Call for Essays

*The Hudson River Valley Review* will consider essays on all aspects of the Hudson River Valley—its intellectual, political, economic, social, and cultural history, its prehistory, architecture, literature, art, and music—as well as essays on the ideas and ideologies of regionalism itself. All articles in *The Hudson River Valley Review* undergo peer review.

## Submission of Essays and Other Materials

HRVR prefers that essays and other written materials be submitted as a double-spaced manuscript, generally no more than thirty pages long with endnotes, as an electronic file in Microsoft Word, Rich Text format (.rtf), or a compatible file type. Submissions should be sent to [HRVI@Marist.edu](mailto:HRVI@Marist.edu).

Illustrations or photographs that are germane to the writing should accompany the hard copy. Illustrations and photographs are the responsibility of the authors. Scanned photos or digital art must be 300 pixels per inch (or greater) at 8 in. x 10 in. (between 7 and 20 mb). No responsibility is assumed for the loss of materials. An e-mail address should be included whenever possible.

Since HRVR is interdisciplinary in its approach to the region and to regionalism, it will honor the forms of citation appropriate to a particular discipline, provided these are applied consistently and supply full information. Endnotes rather than footnotes are preferred. In matters of style and form, HRVR follows *The Chicago Manual of Style*.



**On the cover:** Woman Suffrage Picket Parade, Harris & Ewing, 1917, Harris & Ewing Photograph Collection, Library of Congress. **On the back cover:** Empire State Campaign Committee, crepe-paper banner, 1915, Courtesy of Coline Jenkins, Elizabeth Cady Stanton Family and The New York State Museum

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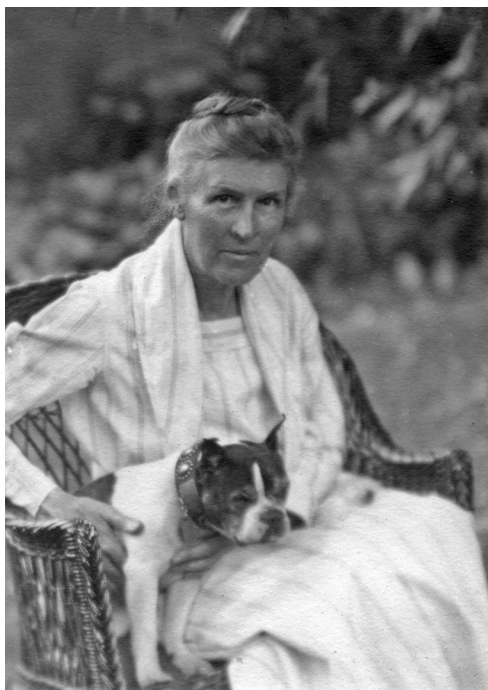
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# The Lost Legacy of Laura Johnson Wylie: An Exploration of Her Achievements in Local Women's History

*Samantha M. Hesler, Marist '19*



Laura Johnson Wylie.  
Courtesy of Archives and Special Collections,  
Vassar College Library

For the history of women and New York State, 1917 was a groundbreaking year. After years of frustration and multiple failed referendums, a new amendment to the state Constitution finally assured women's suffrage.<sup>1</sup> Not all areas of the state had been supportive. The city of Albany was notoriously anti-suffragist, while New York City was the exact opposite. Poughkeepsie was somewhere in between.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 "Votes Cast for Constitutional Conventions and Amendments," *Nycourts.gov*, April 23, 2018, [https://www.nycourts.gov/history/legal-history-new-york/documents/Publications\\_Votes-Cast-Conventions-Amendments.pdf](https://www.nycourts.gov/history/legal-history-new-york/documents/Publications_Votes-Cast-Conventions-Amendments.pdf).  
2 Eva C. Boice, "Woman Suffrage, Vassar College, and Laura Johnson Wylie," *Hudson River Valley Review* 20 (spring 2004).
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While Poughkeepsie was not widely known for its suffragist activities, one person made a lasting contribution. Laura Johnson Wylie, an English professor and department chair at Vassar College, led the way for the suffrage movement in Poughkeepsie both prior to and after the 1917 referendum. The root of Wylie's activism began at Vassar, which at the time was led by an anti-suffragist administration. However, this did not stop Wylie. Her activism expanded into the surrounding city, culminating in her leadership of the Equal Suffrage League and later the Women's City and County Club. Despite the many obstacles she faced at Vassar, through her hard work and excellent leadership skills Wylie made a lasting impact on women's-rights activism in Poughkeepsie and helped set the foundation for a sustained effort of activism in the Hudson River Valley and beyond.

To better appreciate the achievements and contributions of Laura Johnson Wylie, it is important to understand some of the obstacles she faced, specifically in regard to the relatively large anti-suffragist movement in New York State. For suffragists like Wylie, New York was "at once the hope and the despair of suffragists."<sup>3</sup> The anti-suffragist movement, although not officially started until 1894, was a powerful ideology backed by "access to money, leisure, and extensive social networks."<sup>4</sup> The movement stemmed from the Enlightenment ideals of Rousseau, who argued that the role of women was in the domestic sphere where they could help raise future male leaders and maintain tradition in an ever-changing society. Anti-suffragists sought to preserve their important, unique social role. The movement appealed to many women across the state and became so influential that suffragists often had to change their arguments and rationale to succeed in the fight for enfranchisement.

The anti-suffrage movement even had a strong foothold at all-women's colleges such as Vassar. While Vassar was "progressive" in terms of being one of the nation's first female colleges, it "both encouraged and constricted social and intellectual independence."<sup>5</sup> It was a school designed for women, but with an environment and policy manufactured by men. Prominent anti-suffragist leaders such as Lucy Price and Josephine Jewell Dodge were both products of a Vassar education. Many women's college populations were just as divided as the state and the country. A 1911 poll of Vassar's senior class showed large amounts of anti-suffrage sentiments or indifference, with more than twenty-nine percent of students disapproving of enfranchisement, twelve percent undecided, and one percent admitting ignorance.<sup>6</sup> These alarming numbers reflect a fear that advocacy for the enfranchisement of women would take away students' educational opportunities, a non-political atmosphere at Vassar, and the relatively new status of Vassar as a prominent women's college.

The college's unsupportive environment for women's suffrage was largely solidified by its administration under President James Monroe Taylor, who served from 1886 to 1914.

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3 Goodier, Susan. *No Votes for Women: The New York State Anti-Suffragist Movement*, (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 9.

4 Ibid, 7.

5 Brian Farkas, *Covering the Campus: A History of The Miscellany News at Vassar College*, (Illinois, iUniverse, 2009), 15.

6 Mezzacappa, Dale, "Vassar College and the Suffrage Movement," *Vassar Quarterly*, 3 (spring 1973): 4.

Anti-suffragism was cemented by the administration both through action and rhetoric. In one of his most decisive actions, President Taylor banned students from meeting to discuss suffrage in June 1908. This resulted in forty students and alumnae assembling in a graveyard outside the college gates. This meeting, organized by rising Vassar junior Inez Milholland, drew large amounts of publicity to the cause, including negative publicity for President Taylor.<sup>7</sup> In a 1909 speech to alumni known as “The Conservatism of Vassar,” he presented his belief of the specific role of Vassar in women’s education. He explicitly explained that advocacy for other causes, such as women’s suffrage, was ultimately a distraction and disservice to young women who were pursuing their education. According to Taylor, “The mission of Vassar College was not to reform society but to educate women.”<sup>8</sup> While Taylor wanted students to be cultured and truly liberal in intellectual matters, he also wanted his female students to use their education to be better housewives and mothers.<sup>9</sup> Taylor would resign in 1914 as a result of what many considered “friction, suffrage, and socialism.”<sup>10</sup>

Before replacing Taylor, Vassar experienced a short interlude without a president. During this time, the faculty prompted the Board of Trustees to allow them to make their own decisions, specifically in regard to academic affairs. With a new sense of self-governance, the Vassar faculty began to take charge by delegating committees for faculty business and drafting up policy changes. It was during this unique time that students approached the faculty about the creation of a suffrage club on campus. Their idea was approved.

The eventual replacement of President Taylor with Henry Noble MacCracken in 1915 opened up a door for Vassar College and the suffragist movement. A drastic change from Taylor, MacCracken stated that “I stand for progressive and democratic management in college administration; for freedom, self-government and trust in the student body; for the advance of women through the suffrage and through every other means by which man may welcome her as friend and comrade in the business of life.”<sup>11</sup> Though MacCracken was a relatively outspoken proponent of women’s suffrage, it is important to note that he supported moderates and their reforms, not radicals. His staunch refusal of radical suffragists and their ideals presented an obstacle for suffrage to become fully embedded in Vassar culture. Despite seeming so different, MacCracken and Taylor were both troubled by radicalism and they both sought to maintain order, albeit in differing ways, at the institution.<sup>12</sup> One prominent example of MacCracken’s opposition to radical suffragism occurred in the fall of 1915, when he rejected the Suffrage Club’s request to have alumnus Inez Milholland speak on campus. Additionally, he did not allow the group to bring back Emily Putnam, a radical suffragist who had spoken during his inauguration day festivities.

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7 Elizabeth A. Daniels and Barbara Page, “Suffrage as a Lever for Change at Vassar College,” *Vassar Quarterly* LXXIX (June 1983).

8 Elizabeth Hazelton Haight and James Monroe Taylor, *Vassar*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1915), 218.

9 Brian Farkas, *Covering the Campus: A History of The Miscellany News at Vassar College*, (Illinois, iUniverse, 2009), 15.

10 Elizabeth A. Daniels and Barbara Page, “Suffrage as a Lever for Change at Vassar College,” *Vassar Quarterly* LXXIX (June 1983).

11 “The Suffrage Movement at Vassar,” *Vassar Encyclopedia*, Vassar College.

12 Ibid.

Despite this unfavorable climate for a suffrage movement in the early years, there were many students who, like Laura Johnson Wylie, spoke out about women's rights and suffrage. These sentiments can be seen in the student-run newspaper titled *The Vassar Miscellany*, or as it is more commonly known, *The Miscellany News*. *The Miscellany News* had been in print since 1866 and continues to run today. It has served as a "recorder of historical facts and a barometer of values—for Vassar."<sup>13</sup> If *The Miscellany News* represented the pulse of the college, its articles indicate that despite steps towards a more progressive college atmosphere, Vassar was often stuck in its Victorian-era ways until well into the 1920s. "By the early 1920s; *The Miscellany News* would focus almost exclusively on College life and mostly ignore the outside world."<sup>14</sup> When world events or movements such as the First World War were featured in *The Miscellany News*, the articles were often opinion-free and relatively docile. Editors such as Hilda Scott Lass wanted to contribute political commentary but were often told that "making such declarations were not appropriate."<sup>15</sup>

While *The Miscellany News* was surrounded by a conservative environment and an overwhelming focus on campus-related content and issues, some articles represented the emergence of women's suffrage ideals at the school. These ideals and fundamentals were spearheaded by strong leaders and professors such as Laura Johnson Wylie. An editorial in the paper's December 11, 1914 edition showcases this tension between a desire for change and an administration stuck in the standards of the past. The editorial expressed frustration with students' lack of interest and initiative in forming a club to represent the goals and principles of the women's suffrage movement.<sup>16</sup> *The Miscellany News's* female editors were becoming increasingly frustrated with the seeming lack of knowledge about the women's suffrage movement on a state and national level, as well as a lack of care shown to the issue as a whole. In the March 14, 1914 issue, editors questioned the college's lack of attention paid to the idea of women's suffrage, a movement that would drastically alter the lives and roles of women if achieved. The editors also questioned students' lack of interest and initiative under headlines such as "Why Not Organize?"<sup>17</sup> They glibly pointed out the success of campus suffrage movements at colleges such as Bryn Mawr and Wellesley, and they criticized Vassar for being one of the first women's colleges in the country and yet so late to enter the world of politics and suffrage. While the above articles were written about women's suffrage during the time period of 1914 to 1920, it seems that *The Miscellany News* mostly wrote about the suffrage movement at Vassar in hindsight, years after passage of the U.S. Constitution's nineteenth amendment. This fact alone showcases the relatively adverse environment toward the vote for women at Vassar College.

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13 Brian Farkas, *Covering the Campus: A History of The Miscellany News at Vassar College*, (Illinois, iUniverse, 2009), 3.

14 Ibid, 58.

15 Ibid.

16 "Editorial," *The Vassar Miscellany News Supplement*, December 11, 1914.

17 Brian Farkas, *Covering the Campus: A History of The Miscellany News at Vassar College*, (Illinois, iUniverse, 2009), 208.



Yet from this environment there emerged a strong leader of the women's suffrage movement in Poughkeepsie—Laura Johnson Wylie. Prior to entering Vassar as a student, Wylie had an irregular and often insufficient education. Her family relocated often, so Wylie's instruction came primarily via tutoring from her father and her own curiosity.<sup>18</sup> According to historian Suzanne Bordelon, Wylie once noted "that when she entered college she could not spell, knew almost no geography, and was ignorant in many subjects quite familiar to her classmates."<sup>19</sup> Challenges never seemed to faze her. After graduating from Vassar at the top of her class in 1877, Wylie went on to attend Yale, where she was one of the first women to receive a Ph.D. Her 1894 dissertation, *Studies of the Evolution of English Criticism*, was "the first woman's thesis published by Yale."<sup>20</sup> The following year, Laura Johnson Wylie returned to Vassar, this time as a Professor of English. Two years after this appointment, she earned the chair of the English Department, which she held from 1897 to 1922.<sup>21</sup>

Laura Johnson Wylie consistently tried to integrate progressive ideals and forward thinking into her classroom and later the administration, despite teaching on a campus that was often in tension with progressive ideals. "Wylie combined teaching with community volunteer work and a commitment to suffrage and social reform."<sup>22</sup> She was known for more than just teaching English: "she imparted her own interest in things of the spirit to her students, and she dispensed intellectual riches with a lavish hand."<sup>23</sup> Her commitment to integrating ideas and movements of the social world into the classroom was something consistently noticed by both her students and her department. Wylie challenged the traditional thought of the Vassar administration. She discussed the raising of a democratic consciousness and advancement of a democratic government.<sup>24</sup> Among her students and peers, such as Professor Herbert Mills, she was known for her dominant trait: "an ever present struggle for human freedom..."<sup>25</sup>

Wylie was an even stronger advocate outside of the classroom. According to the *Poughkeepsie Courier*, she was a "woman of indomitable energy, she was the local leader of the woman suffrage movement from 1910–1928."<sup>26</sup> In 1909, Wylie, along with her colleague Lucy Salmon, helped establish the Equal Suffrage League in Poughkeepsie. While Vassar students and staff may not have been able to participate actively in progressive movements

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18 Suzanne Bordelon, *A Feminist Legacy: The Rhetoric and Pedagogy of Gertrude Buck*, (Southern Illinois University Press, 2007), 74.

19 Ibid, 74.

20 Lynn Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1990).

21 Suzanne Bordelon, *A Feminist Legacy: The Rhetoric and Pedagogy of Gertrude Buck*, (Southern Illinois University Press, 2007), 75.

22 Lynn Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1990), 130.

23 "Laura Johnson Wylie," *The Poughkeepsie Eagle News*, 4. April, 1932.

24 Suzanne Bordelon, *A Feminist Legacy: The Rhetoric and Pedagogy of Gertrude Buck*, (Southern Illinois University Press, 2007), 79.

25 Ibid, 76.

26 Harvey Flad and Clyde Griffin, *Main Street to Mainframes: Landscape and Social Change in Poughkeepsie*, (Albany, New York, Excelsior Editions, 2009), 110.



on campus, they found an outlet off campus. The League had approximately seventy-four members, more than a quarter associated with Vassar. Wiley became president of the Equal Suffrage League in 1910. Under her leadership, it hosted many events in which women and men congregated over issues that were plaguing the enfranchisement of women. Wylie brought in dynamic speakers such as Inez Milholland, host of the graveyard women's suffrage meeting during the Taylor administration. In a November 20, 1911 Equal Suffrage League meeting at the Collingwood Opera House, Milholland spoke about issues such as "property qualifications, the status of women laborers, and male fear of emasculation."<sup>27</sup> Her sentiments about women needing to work together and cooperate with men are prescient of future second-wave feminism and leading feminists today, such as Bell Hooks. In addition to forums and education, Wylie led the League in canvassing neighborhoods leading up to the 1917 referendum. Her efforts paid off, as Poughkeepsie was "the only major population center along the Hudson River north of New York City that voted for the amendment."<sup>28</sup>

Wylie's efforts for women's rights did not stop after the passage of the 1917 referendum that officially granted New York's women the right to vote. She believed that having won the vote, "women needed to demonstrate that they were responsible citizens."<sup>29</sup> The women of New York still had to prove their worth for a place in society. In order to gain this respect, Wylie founded the Women's City Club, later known as the Women's City and County Club, in 1918. Its goal was to bring "together women interested in the advancement of public welfare and to forward participation in political or civic matters of local, state,

or national scope."<sup>30</sup> The club had many prominent members, such as Eleanor Roosevelt. As it was actively trying to establish itself in the community, Wylie led the charge with a series of different civic engagements, such as the establishment of a community kitchen during the 1919 flu epidemic, or conducting a survey of the destitute housing conditions in Poughkeepsie.<sup>31</sup> Laura Johnson Wylie's leadership of the organization was expansive. In addition to the civic engagement pursued by the club, she brought in numerous speakers dedicated to progressive ideals. In a May 25, 1917 letter to her friend Fanny, Wylie describes how she organized for

### Women's City and County Club Soon to Close a Busy Season

Many Activities Mark  
Past Winter in This  
Organization

Miss Wylie Has Been  
the President Since  
It Was Formed

(Contributed)  
The Women's City and County Club will soon bring the winter's activities to a successful termination prior to the work which will be done during the summer months, not only in the city but in the various sections of the county. During the warm months several meetings will be held in different localities, at which all members, town and county, will have an opportunity to meet and discuss various questions which are arresting in interest, and merit particular attention. One of our brilliant present day thinkers has said: "I believe that education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform. — By law and punishment, by socialization and discussion, society can



MISS LAURA J. WYLIE

Poughkeepsie Star, April 14, 1925

27 Eva C. Boice, "Woman Suffrage, Vassar College, and Laura Johnson Wylie," *Hudson River Valley Review* 20 (spring 2004): 41.

28 Harvey Flad and Clyde Griffin, *Main Street to Mainframes: Landscape and Social Change in Poughkeepsie*, (Albany, New York, Excelsior Editions, 2009), 111.

29 Ibid.

30 "Poughkeepsie Women to Promote Public Welfare," *State Charities Aid Association* 6 (1917), 3.

31 Harvey Flad and Clyde Griffin, *Main Street to Mainframes: Landscape and Social Change in Poughkeepsie*, (Albany, New York, Excelsior Editions, 2009), 111.

“Mrs. Kelly to talk on minimum wage.”<sup>32</sup> This meeting, which focused on the “industrial crisis and how to meet it,”<sup>33</sup> was one of the club’s most successful, with more than 125 members attending.

Wylie consistently encouraged club members to be politically active, something she was unable to do in the same scope at Vassar. Crucial to the club’s ideals was the practice of civics: “the club emphasized members getting to know government officers through the visitors and conferences it sponsored.”<sup>34</sup> It offered classes to teach women how the government functions and how to operate effectively within the system. Once members discovered a social ill within the community, they worked with local officials to generate solutions. While the club was politically active in pursuing social and welfare changes for the city, it also was active in the realm of politics itself. Women’s City and County Club notes state that one of the leading issues the club focused on in 1920 was “opposing the re-election of Senator Wadsworth, on the ground that we did not deem his social conscience sufficiently awakened to the needs of the present day.”<sup>35</sup>

When it came to women being involved politically, Laura Johnson Wylie led by example. An article in the *Poughkeepsie Courier* describes her as being “an ardent advocate of equal suffrage both in the United States and abroad.”<sup>36</sup> Wylie was continuously participating in marches for suffrage and women’s rights. In 1912, she became heavily involved in Rosalie Jones’ “Votes for Women” march from New York City to the state capitol at Albany. With this march, Wylie and other suffragists were petitioning “Governor-elect Sulzer to further



The house at 112 Little Market Street 1930s.  
Courtesy of Archives and Special  
Collections, Vassar College Library

32 Correspondence from Wylie to her friend Fanny Hart, May 25, 1917, Box 3, Vassar Archives.

33 Harvey Flad and Clyde Griffin, *Main Street to Mainframes: Landscape and Social Change in Poughkeepsie*, (Albany, New York, Excelsior Editions, 2009), 112.

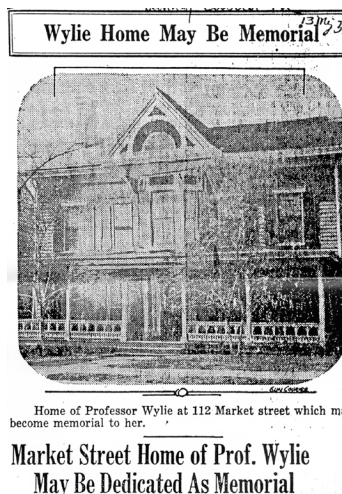
34 Ibid, 111.

35 “Condensed Report of the Executive Secretary of the Women’s City and County Club Given at the Annual Meeting of the Club, May 24 1920.” Women’s City and County Club. Poughkeepsie, NY, Dutchess County, NY: 1920–21. 5–10. [Call number 396.06 P86 (1920–21)] Courtesy of Archives and Special Collections, Vassar College Library.

36 “Equal Suffrage Meeting.” *Poughkeepsie Courier*, 21 Nov. 1911, Poughkeepsie Scrapbook, page 43/ Laura Johnson Wylie Biographical File (Box 4). Courtesy of Archives and Special Collections, Vassar College Library.

‘the cause’ of equal suffrage.”<sup>37</sup> Throughout the march, Wylie presented and spoke to other suffragists on behalf of the Equal Suffrage League. She consistently presented the ideas that women’s suffrage was imminent, that once it occurred, women must vote to protect their rights and working conditions, and that everyone, despite gender, must be free to govern themselves.<sup>38</sup>

Although Wylie tried to bring progressive ideals into her Vassar classroom, she quickly realized she would have to move off campus to implement the change she envisioned. She moved from the traditional on-campus housing for Vassar professors to the heart of Poughkeepsie, in 1908 purchasing a home at 112 Market Street. The large, Victorian-style house with its expansive front porch provided a welcoming backdrop and safe haven for many suffragist activities. It was here that Wylie cultivated her leadership and hosted events and dinners for the Women’s City and County Club until her death in 1932.



Home of Professor Wylie at 112 Market street which may become memorial to her.

**Market Street Home of Prof. Wylie  
May Be Dedicated As Memorial**

Poughkeepsie Sunday Courier,  
June 12, 1932

Wylie’s home was more than just a house—it was symbolic of the incredible legacy she bestowed on her colleagues, her city, and New York State history. Upon her death in 1932, Wylie bequeathed her home to the Women’s City and County Club to use rent-free for six months. The club established the Wylie Memorial Fund, with members donating money to help the organization purchase and maintain the house and Wylie’s memory. With the help of a \$5,000 bank mortgage and contributions from club members,<sup>39</sup> the group was able to acquire 112 Market Street. Over the next decade, the Women’s City and County Club hosted dozens of meetings there. They ranged from social gatherings such as bridge clubs to legislative and city planning meetings.

By 1940, the club was struggling to maintain the property. Despite dwindling membership, it tried valiantly to keep the house through fundraising efforts, such as collecting pledges and producing a pamphlet titled “Our Miss Wylie.”<sup>40</sup> But by the summer of 1940, the club could no longer manage the expenses; it was clear it would have to separate itself from the property. It declared that “a new and most opportune use” had been found for 112 Market Street—Vassar College had agreed to accept the property as a gift in Wylie’s memory.<sup>41</sup> It was used by Vassar to house professor Dr. Emerson Fite, who was also a city assemblyman.

37 “Suffragists in Waiting for Sulzer. Bishop Doane Says the Pilgrims are a Lot of Silly, Excited, Exaggerated Women.” *Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* 30 Dec. 1912: 1.

38 “An Address on Women’s Suffrage: Before Mothers and Teachers’ Association by Prof. Laura J. Wylie Tuesday Afternoon. At Cannon St. School.” *Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle*. 5 Feb. 1913: 5.

39 Memorandum to club members, Laura J. Wylie Collection. Box 3 of 7. (VCSC).

40 Eva C. Boice, “Woman Suffrage, Vassar College, and Laura Johnson Wylie,” *Hudson River Valley Review* 20 (spring 2004): 47.

41 Laura J. Wylie Collection. Box 3 of 7. (VCSC).

More recently, the house provided a base for Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, Inc., an environmental organization created by the famed singer-songwriter Pete Seeger. The organization remained there until 2003.<sup>42</sup> Today, the house, a symbol of Laura Johnson Wylie, is abandoned and in a state of disrepair. There is no sign designating its historic importance.

Within an anti-suffragist work environment and city, Laura Johnson Wylie managed to shine. Despite facing an oppressive administration and campus climate, she and colleagues such as Gertrude Buck and Lucy Salmon were able to generate some discussion about progressive ideals and recruit many students, faculty, and alumnae for her suffragist activities outside of the classroom. Wylie's impact should be remembered not only for securing the vote for women's suffrage in New York State, but also for her major contributions to community life in Poughkeepsie, through the opening of soup kitchens, improvement in housing, and much more. In her obituary, Wylie was remembered as a "truly great teacher, a great woman, and a fine citizen whose life was an example of unselfish service."<sup>43</sup>



Image of 112 Market Street. Courtesy of Samantha Hesler

Today, it seems as if Laura Johnson Wylie's legacy has been lost to both the city of Poughkeepsie and Vassar College itself. As the centennial of national women's suffrage draws near, Wylie's importance to the state suffrage movement and to local civic engagement should be recognized and celebrated. At a time when the status quo was to limit women, Laura Johnson Wylie was able to implement changes throughout her college and her city.

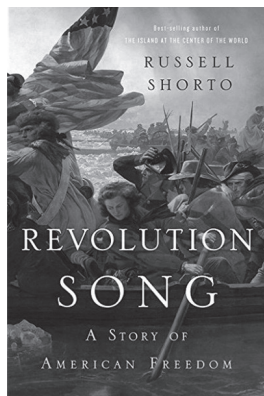
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42 "Poughkeepsie Journal: Clearwater Property was Once Summer Camp for Disadvantaged NYC Kids," *UniversitySettlement.org*, accessed April 24, 2018, [https://www.universitysettlement.org/us/news/News/Poughkeepsie\\_Journal\\_Beacon\\_Camp/](https://www.universitysettlement.org/us/news/News/Poughkeepsie_Journal_Beacon_Camp/)

43 "Laura Johnson Wylie," *The Poughkeepsie Eagle News*, 4. April, 1932.



# Book Reviews



***Revolution Song: A Story of American Freedom*, Russell Shorto (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2018) 512 pp.**

Russell Shorto, best known for *Amsterdam* and *The Island at the Center of the World*, offers his perspective on the American Revolution in his newest work. Shorto's aim is to fill the gap created by "traditional accounts of the Revolution," which he claims have only considered two sides: "the British and breakaway American colonists" (xii). Into this gap, he weaves the stories of six historical characters. Some, such as Lord George Sackville Germain or Abraham Yates, Jr., may be familiar to those with an interest in American Revolutionary history. The Seneca warrior known as Cornplanter, the Guinean slave Venture Smith, or Margaret Moncrieffe Coghlan, the daughter of a British officer, might only resonate with scholars of race, ethnohistory, or gender history. Linking each of these five figures together—the common refrain to Shorto's "song"—is George Washington. How could such a wide cast of historical figures share such a prominent commonality? The short answer is: they don't. As a result, Shorto has crafted a narrative song whose individual parts sound clear enough, yet never seem to find harmony as a whole. Yet, anyone considering this book should count that as a small distraction, for within *Revolution Song* is an impressive examination of race, class, and gender during the Revolutionary era that is well-written and well worth the read.

While it is debatable that "traditional accounts" of the American Revolution approach that history from only one of two perspectives, the focus of several of Shorto's subjects are fresh and engaging. Though the existing scholarship on Germain or Washington is fairly exhaustive, stories that offer the perspective of a Native American or slave or a woman during the Revolution are typically rare. *Red, White and Black* by Gary B. Nash is one such exception, and Shorto's work is equally well-researched and impressive. If one considers *Revolution Song* as six separate biographies, each figure provides a unique and compelling worldview leading up to and during the American Revolution—separate perspectives that stand alone, yet also provide context for each other.

In researching each of his subjects, Shorto should be commended for both the breadth and depth of the sources from which he draws. Relying predominantly upon primary documents, Shorto's research is exhaustive and remarkable given some of his subjects. Of note, Shorto's treatment of Cornplanter, also known as Kayethwahkeh, is powerful and

compelling because of Shorto's ability to fill in the gaps left by the historical record. With Cornplanter (as with each of his subjects), Shorto takes the reader from birth through his early upbringing. He takes time to describe important relationships, events, and influences. This is no small feat, for while the primary material on Cornplanter is understandably sparse, Shorto brings together a wide array of secondary sources into a single narrative that paints the life and impact of one man with remarkable clarity.

Shorto's biography of Venture Smith is equally impressive. He tells the story of this native Guinean who watched his father's murder at the hand of slavers, was removed from his homeland, and subjected to the Middle Passage before being sold into slavery to a New England farmer. Through Smith's eyes, Shorto invites us to see the struggle of one man to hold on to the memory of his lost youth, to resist, and eventually to earn his freedom. What makes this story so compelling is Shorto's use of Smith's autobiography in conjunction with a vast collection of scholarship on both slavery and the slave himself.

In telling the life of Margaret Moncrieffe Coghlan, Shorto paints a melancholy portrait of a young girl relegated to boarding schools while her father, a British army officer, fulfills his duty to the British Empire abroad. While Margaret longs to be united with a father that constantly lets her down, her unfulfilled hope becomes a prominent factor in her relationship with other men as she grows into a woman. Her father's neglect, writes Shorto, shaped the young Margaret into a woman who was both defined by her father, yet led a life in defiance of him (153). As Shorto follows her eventual journey from Dublin to New York, Margaret provides a firsthand account of a city ripped apart by Loyalist sentiment and revolutionary fever. Through the unfortunate death of her stepmother, Margaret finds herself in the unique position of being the daughter of a loyal British officer in the care of a revolutionary militia leader. Thus, Shorto carries the reader on a weaving journey of Margaret's life that takes her closer to the central figure in his book—George Washington—than any of his other subjects.

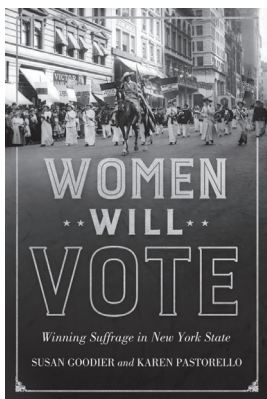
This attempt at a central theme, of a connection between Washington and the book's main characters, is where Shorto falters. In order to link the six to Washington, he relies on vague language—such as “it is possible that...,” or “he may have...”—as a substitute for actual documentation (17, 98). Though Shorto brings the world of Revolutionary America to life with a clear style and a compelling narrative, he also occasionally substitutes historical fact with prose. For example, Shorto supposes that the slave Venture Smith “could have gotten a glimpse of a newly minted celebrity of the war” (Washington) as he passed through New London on his way from Boston (121). Musings such as this serve as a stand-in for the source material typically required of a historian drawing such connections. Shorto's constant suggestion of connection with Washington is something of a distraction.

Of additional concern is the method of citation used in the book. Whether Shorto's choice or his editor's, the result is a confusing labyrinth of back-and-forth page turning

and searching to link a reference made in the text with its source. For example, in order to find the source of a quote on page 492, one must first turn to the back, where every quote is organized by chapter and page. Once the reader finds the quote, a brief citation is given pointing the reader toward a more standard bibliography organized by each of Shorto's subjects. In this case, the reader must turn to the bibliography section on Venture Smith, where one can finally learn that the quote from page 492 was taken from Smith's autobiography. If this sounds like a complicated process, it is—and needlessly so. Footnotes or endnotes by chapter would have better served the academic reader. As is, the book is clearly organized for the casual reader, who may be intimidated by comprehensive footnotes.

All this aside, Shorto has once again proved why he is a standard bearer for research-driven historical narrative that commands the reader's attention. *Revolution Song* is a rewarding read that brings to life the excitement, hope, and loss of those touched by the American Revolution. His style reads like a thriller, altering perspectives from one character to the next at just the right time to leave the reader longing for more. *Revolution Song* is a tune that will resonate with the reader long after the last page is turned.

Michael Mobbs, United States Military Academy



***Women Will Vote: Winning Suffrage in New York State,*  
Susan Goodier and Karen Pastorello  
(Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017) 316 pp.**

Susan Goodier and Karen Pastorello point out in their book, *Women Will Vote: Winning Suffrage in New York State*, that by 1900 New York State not only led the United States politically, economically, and culturally, but also was the most intensely organized state within the national suffrage campaign. It is shocking there was no definitive study on the suffrage movement in New York State prior to the centennial celebration of women winning the vote in New York in 1917, and this book addresses

that issue. The authors argue that New York led the way with the women's rights movement because it started in New York in 1848 at the Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls and that all the national suffrage organizations eventually located their headquarters in New York City, mostly funded by New York donors. Additionally, New York was home to most of the nationally significant suffrage organizers of the national movement—Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Matilda Joslyn Gage, Mary Burnett Talbert, and Carrie Chapman Catt, just to name a few. With such an important and nationally significant story to tell about the New York State movement, why did it take so long to write about it?



*Women Will Vote* makes clear that the seven-decade march to a suffrage victory in New York would not have happened without the efforts of big leaders like Stanton and Anthony, but success lay in multiple different groups working toward the sole goal of suffrage. *Women Will Vote* does an excellent job of interpreting the history of these various groups and the impact of the local work on the state's overall campaign. The book is divided into eight chapters that each could almost stand as an article on its own, but taken as a whole, it is far greater than the sum of its parts. The first and last chapters summarize the start (1848) and end (1917) of the state's suffrage movement. While this information is not new, both chapters do a good job of covering the multiple events and figures that lead to suffrage victory. Chapters two through six highlight the motives and methods of the different groups and constituencies that worked for suffrage across the state. It is in these chapters that *Women Will Vote* makes the greatest contribution to the body of historical literature on suffrage in New York State. For example, the topic of chapter two is the role that rural women played in the movement. New York was a predominately rural state until the first decades of the twentieth century and, as early as the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, suffragists found supporters outside of the large cities. Goodier and Pastorello note, that Upstate leaders dominated the New York State Woman Suffrage Association and they regarded New York City as a 'lost cause' because of its lack of organizational activity. Furthermore, political equality and suffrage clubs were established across the state at the local level, with many more located Upstate than in and around New York City—evidence of this can be found in Appendix 2, New York State Suffrage Organizations and Political Equality Clubs Map and List. Women like Elizabeth Smith Miller (1822–1911) and her daughter, Anne Fitzhugh Miller (1856–1912) founded the Geneva Political Equality Club in 1897, which grew to be one of the largest clubs in the state and hosted conventions for the NYS Woman Suffrage Association in 1897 and 1907.

Immigrant working women and African American women are the topics of the next chapters. While both groups were marginalized, African American women had the extra burden of enduring racism. Goodier and Pastorello assert that African American women in the state had a long tradition of participation in reform organizations including abolition, universal suffrage, temperance, anti-lynching, and civil rights, as well as women's suffrage. They describe how major New York leaders such as Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman were involved in several different reform efforts, as were lesser-known women like Hester Jeffrey from Rochester and Sarah Garnet from Brooklyn. They reiterate how African American women had to deal with racism within the suffrage movement as most suffrage groups in the state remained segregated for the whole of the campaign.

The book continues with the role of men in the movement describing how Frederick Douglass and James Mott were among the first to show their support for woman suffrage

at the 1848 Women's Rights Convention. It would not be until 1909 that a Men's League for Woman Suffrage of the State of New York was established. The authors note that the handsome Max Eastman who was the lead organizer of the Men's League often collaborated with the NYSWSA to publicize the cause of women's suffrage. While most of the activities of the group were centered in New York City, the rural areas in the state formed men's leagues too, such as the one example being in Ogdensburg. In Delaware County and Geneva, men and women joined mixed suffrage clubs. The authors indicated that despite the male presence in the mixed clubs, male suffrage supporters' largest contribution came from their influence with the all-male New York State Legislature.

Chapter six discusses the shift in tactics employed by the suffragists. By 1910, suffragists moved away from meeting in private spaces and into public spaces with street parades, open-air meetings, hikes, theaters, automobile tours, and whatever else would capture the attention of the public and the press. *Women Will Vote* details some of these new tactics and the "New Woman" behind them including Long Island native, Edna Buckman Kearns, along with her daughter Serena, who distributed pamphlets and participated in parades while riding in an old wagon pulled by a horse—a spectacle in 1913. The wagon is currently in the New York State Museum's collection.

The remainder of the book covers the United States' entry into World War I and the decision that suffragists had to make between supporting the war effort or continuing the suffrage fight—several chose to do both, but some like Crystal Eastman, focused only on suffrage and helped to establish the Woman's Peace Party in New York in 1915. It also briefly covers the defeat of the 1915 suffrage referendum and the large push to the final suffrage referendum and victory in 1917. While the final suffrage campaign was a flurry of activity and organization, however, the book does not adequately explain the legislative lobbying and actions that went on for years prior to the 1915 and 1917 referendums. For example, how Harriot Stanton Blatch and her Women's Political Union's work began in Albany in 1910 by setting up an office there, hiring a lobbyist, and putting direct pressure on individual legislators was not well addressed in the book.

The final full chapter focuses on the 1917 suffrage campaign and does this well. However, in my opinion the highlight of the chapter is the little-known personal information of suffrage worker Mary Elizabeth Pidgeon, drawn specifically from her personal correspondence and diaries. Pidgeon was sent by the National American Woman Suffrage Association to organize Upstate New York between 1915 and 1917. The authors trace Pidgeon's important work just prior to the 1917 referendum. In February to June 1917, she worked as a field secretary in Buffalo where she campaigned and learned how to work with the diverse immigrant communities there. In July 1917, Pidgeon was sent to

Auburn to lead Cayuga County's efforts. Having a first-person perspective of a suffrage worker in the final days of the New York campaign is a special touch to this last section of the book and a rare primary source.

The conclusion of the book summarizes the next three years of New Yorkers' involvement in the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1920 and notes the first foray of women into New York State politics. Given the enormity of the seven decade-long suffrage movement and its importance within the larger movement, it is surprising that *Women Will Vote* rarely references the national movement. For example, in 1915 there were suffrage referendums in three other important eastern states—Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey—they, like New York, all lost. Despite this and a few minor omissions, Susan Goodier and Karen Pastorello have managed to accomplish what has not been done before, an interesting, comprehensive, well-written history about the long suffrage campaign in New York State.

Jennifer Lemak, *New York State Museum*



***The Revolution of '28: Al Smith, American Progressivism, and the Coming of the New Deal,***  
**Robert Chiles (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 286 pp.**

In a widely-read and highly-regarded essay published in the *American Historical Review* in 1959, Arthur S. Link, one of the pre-eminent U.S. political historians of his time, pondered the question, “What Happened to the Progressive Movement in the 1920s?” He determined that the reform impulse that had animated politics in the era of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson died out in the 1920s, in large part due to the “lack of any effective leadership.” No significant leader of reform politics again “emerged before Franklin D. Roosevelt,” Link concluded.

Written only fifteen years after the death of former New York State Assembly majority leader, governor, and 1928 presidential candidate Alfred E. Smith, Link's essay was oblivious to Smith's profound impact on 1920s America and the transformation of progressivism into what would become the New Deal. How oblivious? It failed to even mention Smith's name. Link was not alone in overlooking Al Smith. For the rest of the twentieth century, the sheer magnitude of the New Deal's achievements and the captivating and contradictory personality of its Hyde Park architect tended to blot out memories of Smith, who more than anyone laid the foundation upon which FDR built both his policies and politics.

But Smith is finally getting his due, thanks to the fine scholarship of Robert Chiles. As his splendid account of Al Smith's governorship, failed presidential bid, and transformational political appeal makes clear, Smith was perhaps the most influential American politician of the first half of the twentieth century never to hold national office. Not only did he lay the practical groundwork for the limited welfare state that emerged under the New Deal, he assembled key elements of its electoral coalition.

Three features of this well-written book deserve mention. The first is Chiles' brilliant synopsis of Smith's political rise and his rule as governor of New York (1919–20 and 1923–28). This story has been told by other scholars, but none more judiciously or carefully crafted. Chiles surveys Smith's policies on labor, public health, environmental protection, public control of water power, and budgetary and administrative reform with enough attention to detail to capture his monumental impact in making the Empire State a leader on key issues that would define liberal politics for decades thereafter. Chiles discusses some elements of Smith's administration that others have failed to note, including his pioneering use of public authorities and bond measures to assemble a vast system of state parks and initiate projects such as the Taconic State Parkway (Smith's naming of FDR as chairman of the Taconic State Park Commission helped set him up to be his successor in Albany in 1928). He also shows how Smith groomed figures who would loom large in the New Deal years, such as future Labor Secretary Francis Perkins and the prolific builder Robert Moses.

A second achievement of this book is its detailed account of the 1928 election. It preserves how central Smith's economic liberalism was to a campaign that most historians have interpreted mainly through a "culture war" lens that emphasizes the clash between the urban, Catholic Smith and a still largely small town, Protestant America. As Chiles reminds us, Smith repeatedly had to push back against characterizations made by his opponent, Herbert Hoover, that his economic policies were "State socialism" (90). Smith fended off Hoover's red-baiting by reminding voters that virtually every measure enacted to improve the lives of working people "at some time or another in the past twenty-five years has been referred to as paternalistic and socialistic" (4). In the end, however, Hoover's attacks took a toll and cost Smith such Democratic strongholds of the Solid South as Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida, as Hoover rolled to a landslide victory.

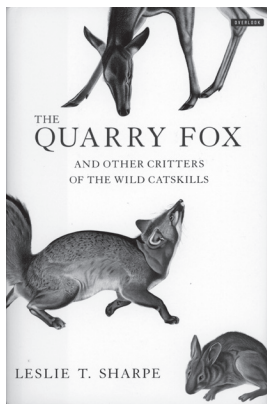
The third and most important contribution of Chiles' book is that it looks beneath the surface of the 1928 results to measure the impact of Smith's candidacy on the pre-New Deal Democratic Party. It has long been noted by historians that Smith performed very well in urban America, despite losing badly to Hoover, but no one has made a more meticulous attempt to measure and analyze Smith's impact on urban voters than Chiles. Looking closely at the industrial cities of New England, he sees a huge shift toward the Democratic Party

by voters who were not only sympathetic to Smith's immigrant background, Catholicism, and opposition to Prohibition, but who were even more intensely attracted to Smith's pro-worker economic policies. For textile workers in cities like Fall River, Massachusetts, there was nothing "roaring" about the 1920s. Their wages were stagnant or declining, and their mills were beginning to close and move to the South in search of cheaper labor. Workers in these cities saw Smith, as they would later see FDR, as their champion, and they flocked to his party, providing the key constituency upon which Roosevelt would later build.

Smith's story was in many ways a tragedy, and Chiles captures its poignancy as well as its political significance. Having lost in 1928, Smith saw his onetime protégé outflank him for the 1932 Democratic presidential nomination and go on to enact on a federal level many of the ideas that he had pioneered in the 1920s. Embittered by seeing this upstart son of the Hudson Valley elite don the progressive mantle that he had crafted during his long rise from his Lower East Side boyhood to the pinnacle of Democratic Party politics, Smith aggressively turned on FDR, leveling against him the same charges of "State socialism" that he had spent his own career fending off.

Much to his credit, Chiles ultimately helps us see how historically interdependent Smith and Roosevelt actually were. Smith blazed the trail Roosevelt would trod; Roosevelt in turn enacted the ideas and built the national political coalition that Smith began but was unable to complete. In these troubled times, we have much to learn from this story, and Robert Chiles is to be commended for telling it so beautifully.

Joseph A. McCartin, *Georgetown University*



***The Quarry Fox and Other Critters of the Wild Catskills,***  
**Leslie T. Sharpe (New York: Overlook Press, 2017)**  
**249 pp.**

The placement of humans as an existential category distinct from plants, animals, and other natural life is a cornerstone of our western thought. In my own discipline of music, the vocalizations of birds and whales are, according to traditional definitions, merely instinct-based communication for survival, adaptation, and reproduction; music—"humanly organized sound" in John Blacking's classic formulation in *How Musical is Man?* (1973)—overlaps only coincidentally with any noises animals might make.

But in *The Quarry Fox and Other Critters of the Wild Catskills*, Leslie Sharpe reminds us that this stark human-nature divide is countered by the strain of nature writing found, for instance, in Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Nature" (1836), where he proposes "the idea that

divinity suffuses all nature, and that through the experience of being one with nature, an inner ‘transcendence’ is possible” (quoted on 183). *The Quarry Fox* is squarely in this tradition, which Sharpe pays tribute to in chapter dedications to John Burroughs, Rachel Carson, Edward Abbey, Loren Eiseley, John James Audubon, Henry David Thoreau, and Annie Dillard. Occasionally there can be such a sensuality to a writer’s encounters with nature, an enmeshment overwhelming the self, that attempts to render it in prose can seem overwrought. Sharpe, an editor, teacher, and past Vice President of the New York Audubon Society, is more conversational in tone, and more inviting—she is less concerned with tracing the ebb and flow of her own subjectivity than she is in turning her gaze outward, celebrating the very real commonalities that exist between humans and the world around us.

As in the best place-based writing, Sharpe evokes a world that will resonate with Hudson Valley inhabitants, while prompting us to examine anew sights and sounds sometimes taken for granted. Her description of the seasons, and particularly the times in-between them, brings forth some of her most lyric writing, as in her description of “that day in August when you step outside, the morning hot and bright, when the sun’s light, so high overhead through summer, has started to slant, its rays angled, more diffuse. And if the wind is blowing (though it’s a warm wind), underneath it is a coolness, subtle, quick, as slight as breath. That, for me, marks the first day of autumn...” (34)

Most especially, though, Sharpe trains her attention on the animals of the Catskills, both common (robins, blue jays, crows, bluebirds, raccoons, skunks, woodchucks, peepers) and exotic (foxes, bears, bobcats, mountain lions). Each essay flows between personal anecdote, folk wisdom, and naturalist erudition, accompanied by beautifully old-fashioned pen drawings. She pays homage to the names and knowledge of the original inhabitants of the Catskills, the Lenni Lenape, and the aphorisms, fables, and folklore of farmers, loggers, and long-time residents of the area. Far from adopting an anti-science posture, her insights are consistently informed by current research into animal behavior, with a wealth of detail from her reading of, and conversations with, animal behaviorists and ecologists.

In linking her everyday observations to known patterns of behavior, Sharpe is eloquent about an apparent contradiction between developing affective relationships with animals and cut-and-dried explanations of their behavior based on survival and reproduction. But she affirms her own impulse towards perceiving more than mechanistic instinct in her everyday encounters: she finds loyalty, devotion, and courage in robins fighting off the attacks of hawks on their young and mates, joy in the dance of the woodcock, curiosity in the blue jay eyeing her from the feeder. Her project is not so much to characterize these animals with human traits as it is to hint at the universality of such traits. She acknowledges, too, the contradictions of rooting for animals at all levels of the food chain: “It is such a



conundrum, loving these creatures that kill and eat each other in that never-ending cycle of life and death in the Catskills” (140). She seems to suggest that it is both natural and challenging for humans to love these animals in the same way, and for the same reasons, that it is natural and challenging to love each other.

In the title essay, Sharpe brings all of her thematic concerns together, narrating various encounters with foxes, and one in particular she meets near an old bluestone quarry, which becomes her particular companion across several seasons. Each meeting is marked by a sense of wonder, and above all, communication: this fox, predator of mice, frogs, and rabbits, hunted itself by coyotes and humans, is curious, sentient, profoundly alive. Sharpe searches biological explanations, local folklore, even Aesop’s tales of the foxy trickster, in trying to identify the sense of commonality she feels with the animal. Yet she stops short of asserting true communication, acknowledging she can never really be sure whether she might simply be projecting an invented communion between self and fox. How like us are animals, really? However detailed our observations, however much scientific detail or folklore we collect, that question can’t be answered with anything like conclusiveness. But Sharpe never stops asking it. The story of the fox spins out across a year of close contact, ending with an abruptness and tragedy that is surprisingly powerful.

Interspersed with such closely-observed encounters are shorter passages of cultural analysis and historical detail that sketch the changing relationship between humans and nature in the Catskills. Sharpe details the early history of settlement and colonization by Native Americans and Europeans, and brings the narrative forward to her own status as a “flatlander,” one of many past and present emigrants relocated from New York City to more rural environs upstate. She notes, too, some of the ecological and conservation issues that historically and currently affect the Catskills, discussing briefly yet passionately the dwindling populations of insects and bats. She saves her sharpest opprobrium for the widespread deforestation of the Catskills in the mid-1800s—an environmental catastrophe of “staggering, and still appalling” waste—in service of industry, commerce, and agriculture (181–184). The story, she notes, has a happy ending: the loss of Catskill wilderness spurred the creation of the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserves and their protection with “forever wild” status in the New York State constitution. The area is, today, largely reforested.

Other than a single mention of “a warming world,” there is no discussion of climate change in *The Quarry Fox*. Global warming is, of course, not a problem specific to the Catskills, but it is the defining environmental challenge of our time, and I found its omission curious in a book so profoundly alive with the detail of nature. The observations Sharpe makes of bird migration, hibernation, species mix, snow melt, and changing seasons are precisely the sorts of once-immutable patterns that are increasingly imperiled in the Hudson Valley, gone haywire in a changing world. Even as she discusses the devastation caused by events like the 2006 “300 year flood” in the Catskills that are projected to become ever



more frequent in a warming climate, she keeps the focus tightly on her personal experience, of terror as flood waters rise, of grief at the damage wrought on the nearby town.

Seeking to evolve our environmental attunement in the context of present dilemmas is a crucial piece of the tradition Sharpe evokes: Emerson and Thoreau sought to promote renewed awareness of nature in an American population increasingly walled-off in urban environments; Rachel Carson drew attention to the degradation caused by a rising tide of chemicals inundating our ecosystems. Part of updating this genre might be to make clear just how vitally relevant a humanistic, holistic perspective on environmental issues remains. How *does* one appreciate the minutiae of natural detail in a time of natural catastrophe? How do we find joy in the yearly rhythms of seasonal change, when those rhythms are increasingly haphazard?

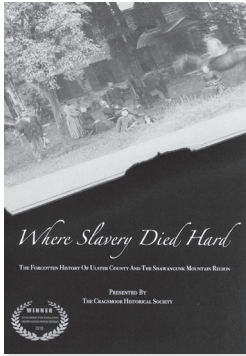
Obliquely, Sharpe proposes an answer or two. As she narrates her experience of the 2006 flood, she relates how she can always anticipate rain's end by the return of bird song—somehow, they know when the storm is lifting, and the return of their song is an early sign the scourge is moving off. Though it may be profoundly changed, nature will persist. Sharpe seems to suggest that even in catastrophe, a deeper, more closely-observed relationship with the life around us may save us, body and soul. Still, I wish she had addressed such concerns more directly and at more length, if only to have her thoughtful voice as part of the dialogue.

Admittedly, the result would have been something of a different sort of book. Skirting hot topic issues allows Sharpe access to insights broader than invasive species, habitat destruction, or even global warming. Life in any epoch is fleeting, and the connections she feels to the natural world suffer from human interference, but from other quarters of the natural world, or simply the entropy of existence, as well. She concludes the "Quarry Fox" essay with the guiding philosophy of the book: "It takes real courage to love the critters of the Catskills" (123). It is a warning, but also an affirmation.

With humanity, elegance, and closely-observed detail, *The Quarry Fox* inspires us to find the courage to love the world around us a little more deeply.

*Joshua Groffman, University of Pittsburgh at Bradford*

# Exhibition & Film Reviews



## **Cragmoor Historical Society, “Where Slavery Died Hard”**

Wendy E. Harris and Arnold Pickman

(The Cragmoor Historical Society, 2018) DVD and online at [www.cragmoorhistoricalsociety.com/slavery-film](http://www.cragmoorhistoricalsociety.com/slavery-film).

The Cragmoor Historical Society has produced a fine historical resource for those with a serious interest in early Hudson River Valley history. Its new documentary, *Where Slavery Died Hard*, is a meticulously researched and enlightening overview of “the peculiar institution” in a remote area of southern Ulster County.

Although remembered as an artists’ colony located on a scenic ridge in the Shawangunk Mountains (south of Ellenville and north of Walker Valley), Cragmoor was the site of a slave-dependent farming community in its eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century incarnations.

The roughly fifty-minute, narrated video is carefully segmented. It begins with a nearly nine-minute historiographical preface that serves as a research tutorial. In this section, various primary sources used to develop the narrative of Cragmoor slaveholding are enumerated—period maps and newspapers, deeds, wills, census records, pamphlets, records of the local Dutch Reformed Church, the early-eighteenth-century van Bergen overmantel painting depicting slaves and owners on a Hudson Valley farm, and the narrative of Ulster County native Sojourner Truth (1797–1883). Also referenced are the archeological findings of SUNY New Paltz Professor Dr. Joseph Diamond regarding a large Kingston, New York, burial ground dating back to the 1750s, along with the call of SUNY New Paltz historian Dr. A. J. Williams-Myers for a “tangible, substantive image of these people and their owners” in the Hudson Valley. (The historical society has placed a full list of resources on its website at <https://www.cragmoorhistoricalsociety.com/slavery-film>.) The viewer is given a succinct economic history of slavery and slaveholding through the Dutch and British colonial eras in New York. One learns that when New York State passed its gradual manumission law in 1799, it was the so-called “Dutch counties” like Ulster that were the most resistant to ending slavery.

Moving more narrowly into a consideration of enslavement within the Town of Shawangunk, the video next narrates the attraction of European settlers to the fertile plains of three creeks in the Cragmoor area—Shawangunk Kill, Wallkill River, and Verkeerder Kill. As early as the 1690s, Dutch and Huguenot wheat and rye farmers from Kingston and

New Paltz began relocating there. During the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth century, they turned to slaves to meet labor shortages in New York.

Pioneer families—the Jansens, Van Keurens, and DeWitts—are then examined in some detail for the next twenty minutes. They were successful farmers, political office holders (town supervisors), and/or businessmen (inn operators) over the course of the eighteenth century and into the early nineteenth century. Individual household heads held nine to fifteen slaves in the 1790 census, and the DeWitts retained three slaves as late as 1820—seven years shy of the end of slavery in New York State. The viewer learns that slaves probably occupied grade- or cellar-level kitchens of their owners' farms, that they were enumerated as chattel along with furniture and farm animals, that some owners bequeathed land to former slaves in the mid-nineteenth century, and that some of Cragmoor's freed blacks once attached to its pioneer families remained in the area until the late twentieth century.

The remaining third of the video takes up several themes. One is the complicity of Cragmoor's social and civic institutions, particularly its churches, in the maintenance of the racial hierarchies implicit in American slavery. Another is regional resistance of slaves to their bondage through arson, murder, and running away. Cumulatively, the carefully mined evidence supports the conclusion that slave labor was critical to the colonial and early national grain-growing economies of Cragmoor and Ulster County. The inhumanity of slavery was philosophical, physical, psychological, social, and material.

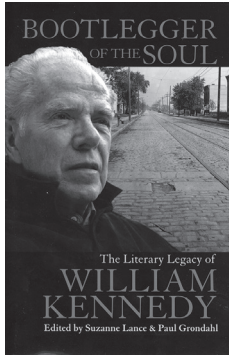
The final minutes of the video offer suggestions for future research and new ways of understanding Hudson Valley slavery. There is reason to believe that archeological work might uncover slave burial sites in Cragmoor, thus augmenting knowledge of existing slave cemeteries in Manhattan and Kingston. The existence of milling operations in Cragmoor along with evidence of a slave miller at Philipsburg Manor suggests that Hudson Valley slaves in upstate areas may have possessed a variety of skills beyond farming—perhaps carpentry and masonry, for instance.

A great deal of important information is packed into every sound bite and frame of this video, but it is rather dull to watch. To help the reader digest the flow of the dense data it delivers, the viewer would be helped by an early roadmap of sorts—a clearly stated outline of the various sections near the start—to supplement the narrator's periodic announcement of new topics. The filming might linger a bit longer on the maps shown to allow the audience to process the geography more fully. Visual summations of genealogies through subtitles superimposed upon other images, or family trees, would assist users interested in the generational aspects of the story of Cragmoor slavery. In several places, the background music, which was meant to be evocative of the period covered, seemed a bit too loud or, because of its tone, distracting from the somber message the video otherwise

methodically presented by narration. The vintage film footage near the end showing black men harvesting grain with a sickle or scythe was also probably meant to be evocative of the past, but in an otherwise painstakingly historical work, the clip, as film, was temporally misplaced and felt strange. Despite these aesthetic quibbles, this documentary is a valuable and accessible tool for conscientious students of local slavery in the North.

*Myra Armstead, Bard College*

# New & Noteworthy Books

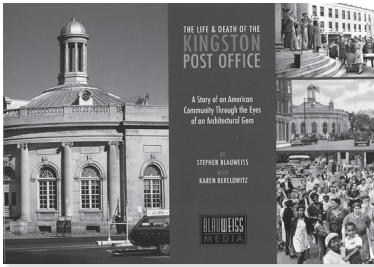


## **Bootlegger of the Soul: The Literary Legacy of William Kennedy**

Edited by Suzanne Lance & Paul Grondahl  
(Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2018)

393 pp. \$29.95 (hardcover) [www.sunypress.edu](http://www.sunypress.edu)

Kennedy, who won the Pulitzer Prize for his novel *Ironweed*, is unquestionably tied to Albany. From his upbringing in the city to his many works set there to his establishing the New York State Writers Institute at the University at Albany, the capital has always featured front and center in his life. *Bootlegger of the Soul* captures Kennedy's impact as a multitalented author through essays, interviews, and reviews, and serves as a biography, memoir, anthology, and tribute in one.

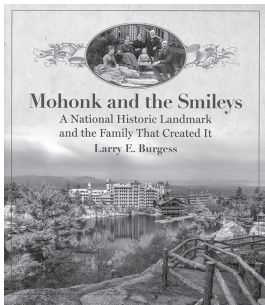


## **The Life & Death of the Kingston Post Office: A Story of an American Community Through the Eyes of an Architectural Gem**

By Stephen Blauweiss  
(Kingston, NY: Blauweiss Media, 2018)

180 pp. \$45.00 (hardcover) [www.blauweissmedia.com](http://www.blauweissmedia.com)

Opened in 1908, the Kingston Post Office was an impressive, Beaux-Arts structure built with Rosendale cement featuring skylights and a large dome. Perhaps more significantly, the structure served as a symbol of the city's growth and development during the first half of the twentieth century. While untimely and regrettable, its 1970 demolition has been the inspiration for multiple successful preservation and restoration efforts since.



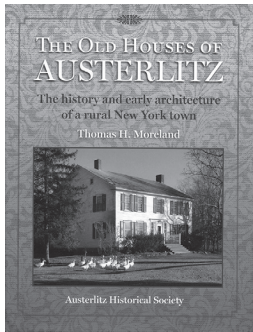
## **Mohonk and the Smileys: A National Historic Landmark and the Family That Created It**

By Larry E. Burgess (Delmar, NY: Black Dome Press, 2019)

240 pp. \$29.95 (softcover) [www.blackdomepress.com](http://www.blackdomepress.com)

The story of the Mohonk Mountain House, which celebrated its sesquicentennial in 2019, is one of conservation, recreation, and dedication. Nestled atop the Shawangunk Ridge in Ulster County, the hotel has been the scene of international conferences,

environmental battles, and a steady stream of visitors looking for an escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life. Through historic photos, postcards, current photos, and other archival images, Burgess captures the many iterations of the landscape, as well as the generations of the Smiley family who have overseen it from the start.



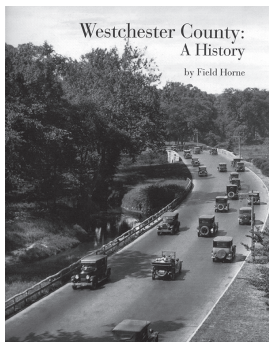
### **The Old Houses of Austerlitz: The History and Early Architecture of a Rural New York Town**

By Thomas H. Moreland

(Austerlitz, NY: Austerlitz Historical Society, 2018)

396 pp. \$35.00 (hardcover) [www.oldausterlitz.org](http://www.oldausterlitz.org)

In rural Hudson River Valley towns like Columbia County's Austerlitz, history is found in its historic homes and structures, which hold many stories of residents from generations past. Thanks to an extensive search of town records and archives, Moreland provides details about 168 buildings predating 1888 and brings to life their many owners. The book also provides a detailed history of the town from the 1750s to the present, a chronological review of its architectural landscape, and hundreds of color photos—shining a well-deserved spotlight on the character and beauty of this community.



### **Westchester County: A History**

By Field Horne

(Elmsford, NY: Westchester County Historical Society, 2018)

257 pp. \$40.00 (softcover) [www.westchesterhistory.com](http://www.westchesterhistory.com)

Stretching from early civilizations through the present day, this well-sourced and very readable account offers an understanding of the people, places, and events that have defined Westchester's identity over the last 400 years. An impressive amount of historic and modern-day images enhance the text and provide the reader with a visual connection on every page. Horne capably separates the history of this county from that of New York City, in which it has so often played a key role, and focuses on how the significant developments and eras in America have shaped the Westchester of today.

*Andrew Villani, Marist College*

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The mission of the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area Program is to recognize, preserve, protect, and interpret the nationally significant cultural and natural resources of the Hudson River Valley for the benefit of the Nation.

**For more information visit [www.hudsonrivervalley.com](http://www.hudsonrivervalley.com)**

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