

The Preservationist

The Schroon - North Hudson Historical Society Newsletter
Third quarter - September, 2024

by Wayne Dewey

In the years before a Fire Department was formed in Schroon Lake, structure fires routinely resulted in damages that were catastrophic. The fire protocol of that day and age was ringing the steeple bell in the Congregational Church (Community Church today) to alert the members of the Bucket Brigade to assemble with haste! That very same bell now sits in its new station on the porch of the new Community Church.

Another bell, with a history all its own is housed **inside** our SNHHS Museum. This bell, dating from around 1875, came to us from the old South Schroon School. At one point in time, the bell was taken to a wooden tree platform by a pasture owned by Harold Swan to keep it from being sold to a local man who wanted it to adorn his motel. After decisions against that sale from the South Schroon and Schroon Town Boards that prohibited its sale, the community people donated it to our museum to be safe from all commercial fates in perpetuity.

This bell is currently parked inside the museum, resting in a

corner on the display room floor. Due to its weight, it is extremely difficult to move and store, often overlooked in spite of its history and value. It would be awesome to see it in a more suitable resting place! To that end I am proposing to once again suspend it where it can be appreciated and used!



We are open to suggestions on how and where to create a new permanent home for it on the museum grounds. There, it could be safely mounted on its supporting hardware. By sheer coincidence, the two *original supporting brackets* were recently donated to our museum by members of the Swan Family! Could the revitalization of the historic bell finally become a new *unique* museum feature?

It also brings another round of engineering issues and protocols that would need to be explored.

Does the bell remain inside the building or will it now see the light of day? Would it result in a neighborhood nuisance issue? Perhaps it could be equipped with a removable "silencer" of sorts to control its use? Maybe it should be incorporated into a "wishing well" adaptation?

Perhaps the best idea would be to set it up in place **inside** our Annex Building for its final resting place!

Whatever course of action is taken, it must be *safe for our guests to enjoy and agreeable with the community*.

Let's put our heads together and come up with the best answer! *'DING, DING, DING!'*



Graciously submitted
by our Guest Contributor
Dave Waite

A Fugitive At Large in Schroon Lake!

John I. Filkins and the
Reward for His Capture

New York Sun March 13, 1871

TRIAL OF JOHN L. FILKINS. PHOTOGRAPH OF THE ALLEGED ALBANY EXPRESS ROBBER.



The Life of John L. Filkins—Flight, Pursuit, and Capture—Scene in the Albany Court Room—The Old Detective's Testimony—The Trial to Conclude To-day.

On the evening of January 6, the train which leaves the Union depot at Albany at 6:30 had arrived at the station, and stopped to take on passengers from Troy. One of the men, happening to pass the express car, heard some one rap-

with the Connecticut Heavy Artillery, it was likely that the furthest thing from his mind that night was violence and guns. As the train was leaving East Albany,

Halpine heard someone step in the open door of the train car, and before he could even turn to greet them, a shot rang out and a bullet pierced the back of his skull.

Though knocked down and nearly senseless, his assailant stepped in

the stage at that point to Schroon Lake. Unfortunately for him, the driver of the stage, a Mr. Watkins, had seen and read the descriptions so extensively circulated, and suspected his passenger. On the arrival of the stage at Schroon Lake, the driver communicated his suspicions to the proprietor of the Odawa House, and together they made his arrest at 11 o'clock on the night of the 16th of January.

On being arrested, he confessed himself to be John I. Filkins, but denied all knowledge of the crime. On Jan. 17 Superintendent Dwight received a despatch from Glen's Falls announcing the capture, and the news

SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE.

Eager multitudes gathered around the corners discussing the event, and threats of violence to the prisoner when he shall arrive were frequently heard from the excited populace. The officers having the captive in charge arrived at Saratoga in the afternoon, and thence they sent a despatch to Chief of Police Mallery, saying that Filkins would be detained there until to-morrow, on account of the danger apprehended in bringing him here in the night. There was an immense crowd at the depot waiting the arrival of the train, and

THREATS OF LYING

were freely uttered. After the arrival of the train the throng rushed for the jail, completely blocking up Maiden lane, and endeavoring to make their way into the building. But the doors were barred, and a strong force of police was detailed to keep the throng back. The crowd would not believe the story of his stopping in Saratoga, thinking it a ruse on the part of the police to mislead them and get him into the jail unobserved. They continued to lounge about the building until a late hour, and dispersed only when thoroughly chilled through. The excitement over the arrest was intense, and had the prisoner arrived that night, doubtless an attempt at violence would have been made, though the police had taken every precaution to defeat it. Nothing further interfered with public tranquillity until it was one morning reported that Filkins had been taken before Halpin, lying in his bed, and the wounded man had in substance said, "That is the man."

OUR SERIAL.

With the noise of the train and surrounding city, no one heard the shots, and it was only by luck that Halpine was found while still alive. His coworkers did what they could to slow the bleeding, and rushed him to a nearby doctor. Though gravely injured, Thomas Halpine was able to describe his assailant as a man about five feet nine in height, having a mustache and chin whiskers, wearing dark clothes, and without a hat. With only these vague details, the police quickly started their investigation. In hopes of bringing the perpetrator to justice, the American Merchants' Union Express Company announced a five-thousand-dollar reward for his capture.

The first break in the case occurred five days later when a store clerk reported that he had sold a pistol to Albany baker John I. Filkins only hours before the robbery. When Filkins was questioned by detectives, his answers were vague, but as he seemed to be an upstanding member of the community, nothing further was done. In many ways Filkins fit as a suspect, his appearance matched Halpine's description, and before buying a bakery he worked both for the railroad and as an express messenger for the company that was robbed. When a pistol that matched the one sold to Filkins was found a few days later near the crime scene, enough evidence had been collected to make an arrest.

It was the evening of January 6, 1871, on what seemed to be just another night of work on the Albany train for 28-year-old express messenger Thomas A. Halpine. Though a veteran of four years in the Civil War, where he fought at Fredericksburg, Virginia Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg

and shot him twice more in the face, the weapon so close that it left powder marks on his skin. Taking Halpine's keys while he lay bleeding and helpless, the burglar then opened the safe, quickly pocketing two thousand dollars in small bills, and then fled unseen into the night.

Unfortunately, when the police arrived at Filkins' bakery he had already fled, leaving in such haste that his dough for the day was abandoned while still rising. What ensued was possibly one of the slowest chases in local history, with Filkins traveling on foot and his pursuers following his path as tips came in reporting his movement northward. After leaving Albany he was seen first in Ballston and then Saratoga, and finally on Friday, January 17th, eleven days after the robbery, at the outskirts of Glens Falls. During the weekend, he continued walking northward, finally stopping at the farm of Otis Weathers on the outskirts of Warrensburg.

That next morning Filkins made a decision that led to his arrest. Tired of traveling on foot, he hailed the Schroon Lake stage that went past the Weathers farm. As the stage driver immediately recognized him from a description in the newspaper, once they got to the Ondawa House in Schroon Lake, steps were taken to bring about his capture. At two am, ex-secret service agent William Arthur who had been following Filkins's trail, knocked on the suspect's door with the announcement that "it was four o'clock and the stage is ready," then took him into custody as he stepped into the hallway.

The wheels of justice moved quickly for Filkins, and on Tuesday, March 14, 1871, his trial was concluded. The next morning the

jury returned a verdict of guilty to the charge of burglary in the first degree. The judge lost no time in sentencing him to 20 years in prison.

In July of 1871, the American Merchants' Union Express Company started the process of distributing reward money by requesting that the claimants work out amongst themselves each of their shares. Not surprisingly, the claimants were unable to agree, so the decision was passed to the judge who had presided over the trial. Ten months later Judge William L. Learned gave this ruling for distributing the reward:

The men who arrested Filkins at Schroon Lake: Sixty-five-year-old Joel Potter, a surveyor from Schroon Lake; Charles F. Leland proprietor of the Leland House on Schroon Lake; John D. Burwell, proprietor of the Ondawa House in Schroon Lake and William A. G. Arthur of Ticonderoga, each received \$1,725; Thomas Braidwood, a cast metal moulder from Albany, who reported seeing him purchase a pistol from a pawn broker, \$805; twenty-five-year-old Robert A. Scott, the Albany store clerk who sold Filkins the revolver used in the robbery, and who testified that was instrumental in securing the robber's conviction \$375; William H. Foos of Saratoga \$575 for furnishing the first information of the route Filkins took in his escape which led to his capture; Jeremiah Flood an Albany cab driver, who had seen Filkins around the express car the night of

the robbery, \$375; and William A. Whalen, another Albany moulder, who found the revolver used in the shooting \$775.

Thomas A. Halpine survived the attack by Filkins, and after six months of recovery was back at work as an express agent, having transferred to the North Adams, Massachusetts office. It was here that an irate customer pulled a pistol on him, though this time bystanders quickly stepped in. After this second incident of facing a gunman, Halpine lived another 40 years, passing away in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1915 at the age of 71.

For John I. Filkins, facing twenty years of confinement seemed more than he could manage. In May of 1872, only fourteen months into his sentence, Filkins and three other convicts planned an escape from Clinton Prison in Dannemora, New York. Somehow obtaining a quantity of gunpowder, fuses, a sledge hammer, and a metal saw, over a number of days he cut through the hinges of his cell, then lighting the gunpowder to hide his movements, he used the sledge hammer to open up other cells, releasing four other men who planned to escape with him. By removing bars on a window, the convicts got into the yard and over an outer fence, with Filkins the first to be recaptured.

Only three months later Filkins attempted another escape. Again obtaining gunpowder and tools, his plan was thwarted before it

could be carried out and he was punished by being confined for a time in heavy chains. Three years later he made his final escape attempt. At the time of his disappearance, it was believed that he had somehow obtained civilian clothes and walked out the main gate with a group of departing visitors. Later that month workmen found a skeleton in the prison sewer, with the remains quickly identified as that of Filkins. We will end this story with the question asking if this really was Filkins. When robberies similar to the one in Albany years before started in Canada, the July 22, 1875, *Potsdam Commercial Advertiser* left the whole matter open with this statement:

The idea that this skeleton was the mortal remains of the express robber is already disregarded, and the belief is current in some quarters he is still alive and well in the neighboring Dominion of Canada.

Sources for the article are the newspaper archives at nyshistoricnewspapers.org and fultonsearch.com. (end)



**A feature by Past President
Loris Clark**



Loris has “regaled me” with a story of two roads in South Schroon that fundamentally reshaped the nature of that community. In earlier times, US Route 9 was the best option for reaching Schroon Lake from the south by automobile. South Schroon was the last waystation before reaching the lake. Travelers would often stop and ‘stock up’ with provisions to take into camp. This all changed with the construction of the ‘Adirondack Northway’. Gone were all the noisy delivery trucks and eighteen wheelers that used to shatter the peaceful atmosphere of this quint little town. Today’s South Schroon residents are nevertheless, very proud of their place in local history while it is now quiet and less travelled. (wed/lc)



THANK YOU

Supporters for 2024*

- Paul Gregory
- Leo & Nancy Sawyer
- Town of North Hudson
- Robert Dichter & Susan Fox
- Joel Friedman
- Morgan Stanley Gift:
Hochwalt Naumann Fund
- Brenda Borquist
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- Blue Ridge Motel
- Tony & Deb Bacchetta
- SL Chamber of Commerce
- SL Department Store

***Editor’s note:**

This list is generated from multiple spreadsheets and emails over the time period between the publication of our previous and current newsletters.

From the Desk of the President

I write this letter, hoping and praying that every one of our members and supporters had a wonderful summer that has included spectacular memories, and lots of laughter and love. We, the board members and volunteers of the Schroon -North Hudson Historical Society kicked off the year in December, preparing for the Summer of 2024. Plans included the dedication of a Pomeroy Historical Marker to commemorate our beloved Schroon Lake Boat House Theatre, our opening weekend with a tasty Ice Cream Social, several new exhibits, two programs for children, and an educational lecture about the former New York Serpentarium that was located in North Hudson, NY.

Our first event, the dedication of the Schroon Lake Boat House Theatre with a Pomeroy Foundation Historical Marker was a huge success, with many folks attending, school children participating and many wonderful speakers that included dignitaries, and volunteers that had been working for years to save the Boat House Theatre and make sure it is recognized as an important historical structure in our beautiful town. It was a blessing to have Bogle Family descendants present and to participate in this ceremony. They were moved by the care that was put in to remembering the men in their

family that built this beautiful building that we now treasure. It was an event that many folks will look back and smile for years to come. I personally was very sad that I could not attend, unfortunately I had been exposed to COVID 2 days before the event and I refused to attend and expose our senior volunteers and guest just in case I had contracted it.

Following the Boat House dedication the next event we held was our Ice Cream Social which was our opening weekend, and it was a HUGE success as usual. We were very grateful once again for the donation of Ice Cream for our event from the Stewart's Foundation. Everyone loves stopping by the Ice Cream tent for a sweet treat. We had many visitors come through and view our newest exhibits and participate in our Silent Auction and Gift Basket Raffle held on the porch. The day was a huge success, raising well over \$500.

In July, we were all geared up to hold our first children's program, which would include learning to do Embroidery. Unfortunately, mother nature had other plans for us and our entire town with a huge storm coming through that knocked the power out too many areas of our region for up to 3 days. We were forced to cancel the program but have plans to partner with the Schroon Lake

Public Library and bring this program to the children of our community in the next few months.

Luckily, our second children's event was held the first week of August and was a success. The program included making traditional wooden sailboat kits, which I had the tremendous privilege of supervising at the Schroon Lake Park Pavilion. Our wonderful volunteer, Mr. Wayne Dewey accompanied me and brought along the boat model of the Evelyn and some amazing photos for the kids to look at and learn about the history of boating on our lake. We had a lot of fun, and parents stayed and participated! Their help was invaluable because the sailboat kits arrived with direction in only Chinese language. That is not how we ordered them but that is how we got them, but we are Adirondack tough and made it work.

Lastly, our final program of the summer included the History of the New York Serpentarium that was located in North Hudson. William Brown, former employee of the serpentarium and lifetime biologist, graciously gave the lecture. Unfortunately, mother nature did not cooperate for this program either. About an hour before the event was to start, the heavens opened, and torrential rain began. We sadly only had



about 7 folks in attendance which was disappointing, but it did allow us to have very personal conversations with the speaker who took lots of time at the end of answer questions folks had regarding the serpentarium or any of the numerous photos of the serpentarium he had showed us. It was a pleasant evening.

Now that summer is a wrap, we are excited to hold our Senior Day on Sunday, September 15th from 2pm to 4pm. We hope all our seniors in the region will come and view our summer exhibits and enjoy refreshments as our guest. We will also be honoring our volunteers that worked tirelessly this last year to provide our guests with an amazing 2024 Summer experience.

We are also very excited to announce that we have been awarded a \$2000 grant from the Community Fund for Gore Mountain Region. This grant will allow us to provide a two-day indigenous peoples program for the youths of the future. On one last note, if anyone with accounting experience would be interested in serving as a volunteer treasurer for our amazing organization, please reach out to me at mamatstampin@gmail.com.

I hope that you have a wonderful fall full of pumpkin spice and lots of beautiful colors...

Best regards,
Tammy


Hollywood Memorabilia!

Our museum gets some star power



This desk was John Rossi's personal desk from which he booked movies for many local theaters owned by the Rossi Brothers, including THE STRAND and PARAMOUNT THEATERS in Schroon Lake.

The desk was obtained by John from Columbia Movie Studios. They provided the desk for actor James Stewart during the filming of "Bell, Book, and Candle" in 1958.



Desk donated by John Rossi's daughter, Emily Rossi-Snook.



Emili Rossi-Snook