

Mr. Doolittle's Mill

Four generations of the industrious Doolittle family figure prominently in the development of greater Fleischmanns. Mills of all sorts, powered by the waters of the Bushkill and an artificial canal dug through the center of the community, built the family's reputation among farmers and builders the region around.

This dynasty began with Joseph Chilson Doolittle. He was born in 1792 in Connecticut where he learned the

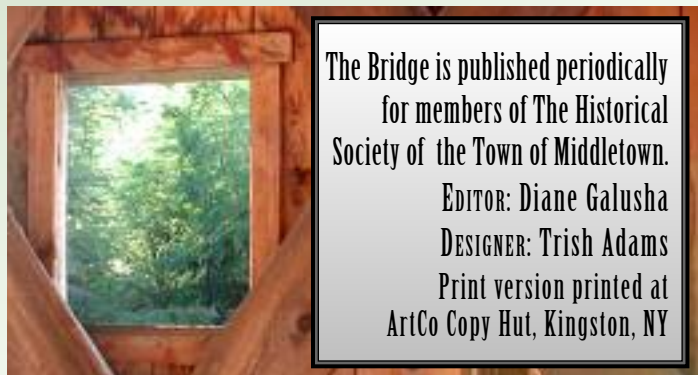
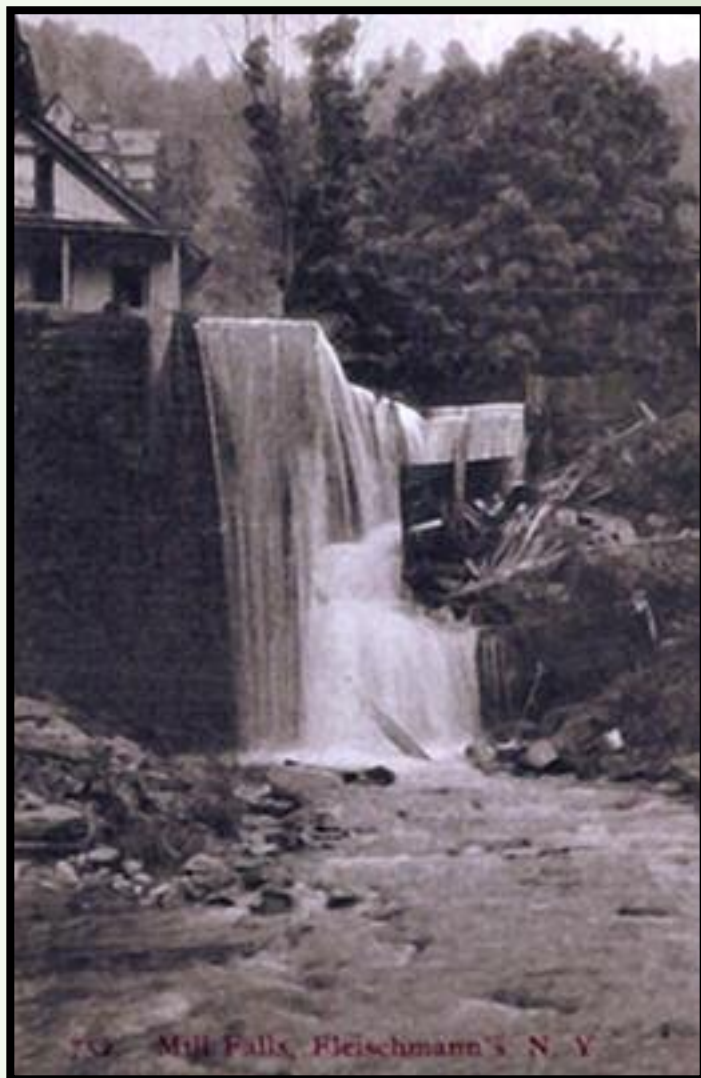
millwright's trade. In 1824 he moved, with wife Lorena and some of their children, to Delaware County. His knowledge and skill were much in demand in building and starting mills like the one he built c. 1829 for Noah Ellis in the area soon to be called Griffins Corners, later known as Fleischmanns. Joseph also bought a woolen carding mill just downstream in Clovesville, operating it for nearly 20 years before turning it over to eldest son George (1813-1899).

George, who had apprenticed as a youth with a Hobart wool spinner and dyer, joined his father in business in Griffin's Corners in the 1830s. The Doolittle enterprise was expanded+ to include a sawmill and a grist mill. George and wife Sally Dodge Doolittle (1817-1896) had seven children and lived across the Bushkill and Main Street from the mills, next to the Methodist (now Baptist) Church (see map on page 6).

The third generation of Doolittle millwrights was George and Sally's son Erastus Dodge Doolittle (1847-1912). His education was at the district school, and in the mills. The 1870 census said Erastus, 24, "works in sawmill." He and wife Elizabeth (Person), had a toddler and an infant and lived next door to his father, whose

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The debris in this postcard (left) of Doolittle's Mill falls, c. 1907-10, may be from the 1907 fire that destroyed the mill.



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property was valued at \$8,000, a small fortune at that time.

By 1875, E. D. Doolittle was a full fledged 'miller,' having purchased from John Vandermark the grist mill originally built by Erastus' grandfather Joseph half a century before. The mill was located just upstream from his father's mills, just east of Depot Street. Here's what the 1895 Biographical Review of Delaware County had to say about Erastus and his mill:

"He began grinding corn, wheat, buckwheat, and fertilizers on his own account, besides doing a great deal of custom work. The products are shipped to many places, but mostly to Maryland and Washington (DC). In the decade from 1875 to 1885 Mr. Doolittle did an immense business and is still (1895) shipping a hundred tons of buckwheat flour southward every winter. In addition to

his mill he owns the store on the opposite side of the street, and a blacksmithy and cooper's shop nearby."

The grist mill was powered by the channeled water of the Bushkill. According to Melvin Mayes, whose memoirs appeared in the Fleischmanns Flyer in 1975, "A dam was built below the Bushkill bridge on Division Street and from its north shoreline a raceway, a small canal of some eight feet wide and two feet deep, was dug by horse drawn scraper and hand shoveling. It was banked on the Bushkill side along the side of lower Main Street, then known as the 'Dug Way.' This race emptied into a bulkhead at the mill. The bulkhead was made of 2x8-inch hemlock planks (forming) a square silo type bin about eight feet square by six feet high."

Water entered the bulkhead which concentrated its pressure to pass through a flume to a water wheel turbine which generated power to operate the mill, and,

Thanks to Roger Davis for this undated postcard of Main Street Griffins Corners, showing Doolittle's Mill on the left. The mill burned in 1907 but was rebuilt. One of the buildings across the street is believed to have become Miller's Drug Store in 1911. Proprietor Philip Miller (1885-1969) was a Russian immigrant. The building was purchased by Ellsworth Reynolds in 1941.



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later, to supply electricity to three Doolittle homes nearby (two were built in the 1890s across the Bushkill on Wagner Avenue). The raceway, which appears in a 1927 Sanborn insurance map of the area, has long since been obliterated by road and sidewalk construction and a succession of floods.

Erastus and Elizabeth had nine children. Three died young, including Charles, who reportedly drowned in the raceway in 1883 at age 13. Son Frank, born in 1882, became the fourth generation of the family to assume operation of Doolittle's Mill.

The first years of the 20th century were challenging. In 1903 burglars blew open the safe at the mill and got away with some cash. In February of 1907, the mill burned to the ground in an early morning fire that was believed to have begun in the electric plant. Fire fighters focused on saving the Miller Drug Store and the 'Doolittle tenement house' across Main Street, according to the *Catskill Mountain News*.

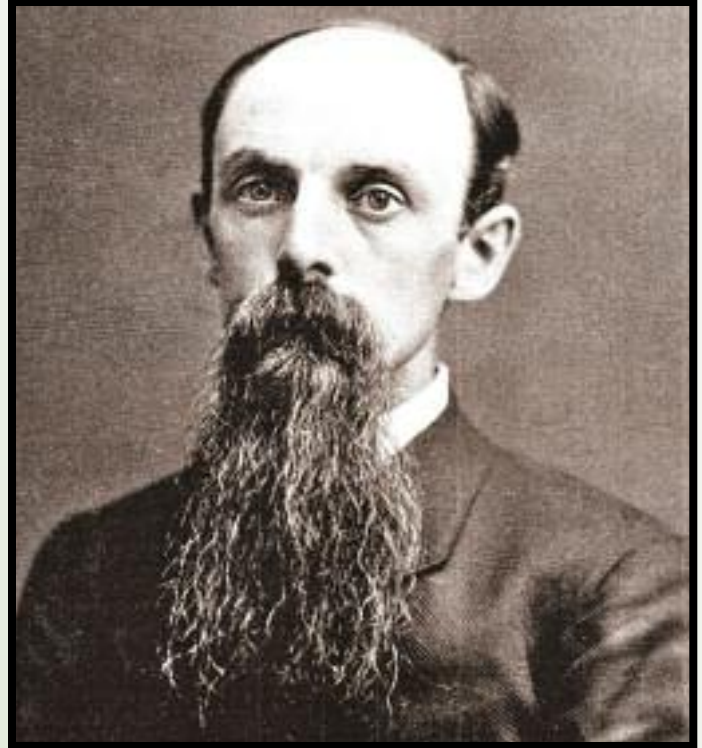
Erastus and family immediately set to rebuilding, and by summer the mill was operational again. In 1908 an addition was added to house the post office. Charles Vermilyea, Erastus' brother in law, was the railroad station agent and postmaster. When he retired from the former, he kept the postal job and moved the post office to the mill.

In 1910, Erastus installed a 20 hp gasoline engine at the mill. "He is now prepared to do all kinds of grinding, whether there is water or not," reported the News. "There is no better buckwheat flour than that which comes from Doolittle's mill."

By then, 28-year-old Frank was working alongside his father at the mill. In 1912, he became the proprietor when Erastus died at age 65. Elizabeth followed her husband in 1915. They and many other members of the Doolittle clan are buried in Clovesville Cemetery.

The mill continued to operate for several years, though at some point it became a retail feed store. It is shown as 'F. A. Doolittle feed warehouse' on the 1927 Sanborn insurance map. We could not determine what ultimately became of the building.

Frank and Olive Fowler Doolittle raised two daughters, Olive and Elizabeth. Wife Olive died in 1942. In 1951, Frank moved to Florida to live with daughter Olive Ryals, and the Doolittle home was sold. Frank died the following year in Florida. The Doolittles' Fleischmanns dynasty was over.



Erastus Dodge Doolittle (1847-1912) was the third generation of millers in his family.

A Brief History of Clovesville, pre-1880

"On the Bush Kill, at the mouth of the Red kill, is one of the oldest business places. The building of the turnpike through here gave it its first impetus. Noah Ellis built a store here in 1806, and eight years later Abram Beadle opened a hotel. John Winn built a hotel here before 1799; it was the first frame house built in the town of Middletown. It stood until recently. There is a tradition that Mr. Winn was mobbed and hung for his loyalty to the crown after the settlement of peace at the close of the Revolution. Ezra Waterbury built a carding and cloth dressing establishment here. He removed in 1828. George W. Doolittle built a carding mill in 1843 on the same site. Twenty years later he built a sawmill there. The last sawmill here is owned by John Kelly. Humphrey's tannery has been abandoned, and the whole place has a kind of goneaway look, as though the enterprise of the hamlet had gone upstream or floated down-which is about as near the truth as we can get it."

This Clovesville snapshot is from *Munsell's 1880 Illustrated History of Delaware County*. A Clovesville map from *Beers Atlas of 1869* is on page 6.

**Enjoy these highlights of our 8th Annual
Living History Cemetery Tour
June 22, 2019!**

Ginny Harmelink, near right, traveled from Arizona to attend the June 22 Cemetery Tour, when Joyce St. George, far right, portrayed Ginny's grandmother, Eleanor Sands Marvin Schrater who described 1890s visits to her grandparents, George and Catherine More Decker in Margaretville. The Deckers lived in the present Dave Budin house — Del Sports — on Main Street. Dave showed Ginny through the house while she was in town, and Ginny presented HSM with a bible that had belonged to one of the Deckers' daughters, Alice Augusta (1853-1893), wife of Orson Swart (1841-1917). The Swarts lived around the corner from George and Catherine, in the house now occupied by Tom Filupeit at the corner of Church and Maple. Eleanor Marvins Schrater's memoir describes going to the Swarts house, where she ate all the pancakes she wanted with maple syrup and home-made butter that was churned in a stone crock. We thank Ginny for sharing family history, donating the bible, and for coming all the way across the country to attend our signature event!



Amy Taylor's portrayal of Abigail Clum (below) moved some tour goers to tears. Learn more about the Clum family's hardscrabble life in Bull Run at an August 17 program, "Ghosts on the Land," by Jennifer Kabat. (See calendar on back page.)

Margaret Hallock Newton (aka Anne Saxon-Hersh, below right) found a moment of peaceful reflection in the late afternoon sunshine.

Kelly Keck and Dave Turan (top, facing page) portrayed World War I veterans comparing their experiences on opposite sides of the conflict.



Many thanks to the cast, docents, and at-large characters who brought the 2019 Living History Cemetery Tour to life: Barb Atkin, John Bernhardt, Director Frank Canavan, Mary Colfer, John Exter, Lizbeth Fermin, Tina Greene, Anne Saxon Hersh, Burr Hubbell, Kelly Keck, Agnes Laub, Jim Rauter, Joyce St. George, Amy Taylor, Eli Taylor, Dave Turan, LilliAnn, Kate, Bella and John VanBenschoten; Nick Verni, Gretchen Walker.





Jim Rauter and Gretchen Walker played Dr. James and Harriet Allaben (right).

Victorian picnickers John Exter and Lisbeth Fermin (below) shared some bread and cheese between tour groups with LilliAnn and Bella VanBenschoten, who were the Griffin children for the day.



The challenge continues!

Thirty donors have contributed \$22,815 towards a challenge issued by the Nicholas J. Juried Family Foundation which promises to add another \$50,000 to the HSM Building Fund if we can accumulate \$160,000 by September 30.

Can you help us reach this target? No donation is too small! To contribute electronically, please visit mtownhistory.org. Or mail a check to HSM Building Fund, PO Box 734, Margaretville, NY 12455.

A giant thank-you is extended to Josef and Vicki Schoell for their \$10,500 gift in memory of Joseph and Agnes Schoell and Myrtle and Lee Bean. In addition, the Nor'easters Metal Detecting Club gave us \$5,000, \$3,000 of which was applied to the Building Fund (see page 7). And we are grateful to the Rotary Club of Margaretville for its generous gift of \$1,000.

Sincere thanks go out to all of the generous Challenge Donors (late April-July 25):

This map of the Clovesville hamlet (in what is now Fleischmanns) comes from the seminal 1869 *Beers Atlas*. You can read a historical snapshot of this hamlet from *Munsells Illustrated History of Delaware County*, on page 3. These are exactly the kind of resources the planned HSM archives will make accessible to all local history buffs!

BILL AND ANNA BLISH, \$600

HERB AND ELEANOR BLISH,
\$100

AMY BROCKWAY, \$50

BLYTHE CAREY, \$30

CATSKILL WOMEN'S
NETWORK, \$25

LOREN AND SUSIE DANIELS,
\$50

ELLEN FAUERBACH, \$100

JOE AND CORLISS HUBERT,
\$100

MALCOLM HUGHES, \$100

GALE KABAT, \$250

RICHARD KELLY, \$1,050

AGNES AND MILTON LAUB,
\$250

NORMAN AND JOANN
MAENDER, \$250

COLLEEN MARTIN AND BILL
MALANGA, \$1,000

GARY MEAD, \$100

NEW KINGSTON VALLEY
ASSOCIATION, \$100

NOR'EASTERS METAL
DETECTING CLUB, \$3,000

CRAIG RAMSAY, \$200

LLOYD AND KARIN
ROLAND, \$100

ROTARY CLUB OF
MARGARETVILLE, \$1,000

JOSEF AND VICKI SCHOELL,
\$10,500

DAVID SCHOLDER, \$50

WARD TODD, \$260

FRED AND ALIX TRAVIS,
\$1,000

DALE TRETAWAY, \$100

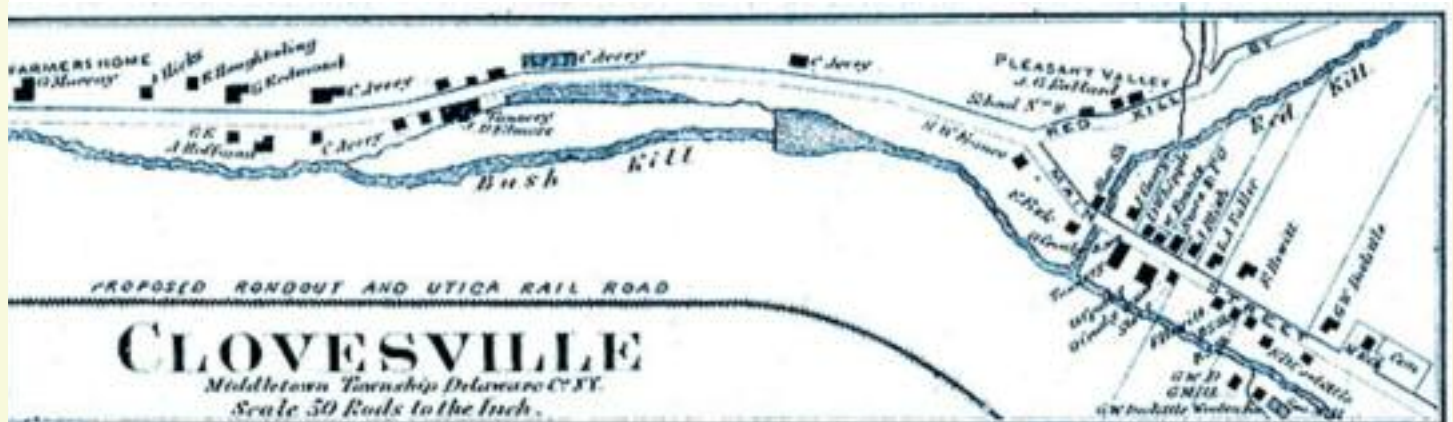
NICK AND ELLEN VERNI,
\$100

VILLAGE OF MARGARETVILLE,
\$500 (HALF OF THE MUNICIPAL
ALLOCATION TO HSM)

DAVID VREDENBURGH, \$100

ANONYMOUS, \$1,500

ANONYMOUS, \$250





In June, HSM welcomed 45 members of the Nor'easters Metal Detecting Club to the New Kingston Valley to search for buried 'treasures' on several properties, including the 1815 stone house owned by George Caswell. The Thompson Hollow house was erected by John Hewitt (1785-1870), a Connecticut émigré who married Sally VanBenschoten (1792-1887), daughter of pioneer "Uncle" Jacob VanBenschoten. They had seven children, including a son Elijah (1825-1894) whose elderly widow Louisa Maria Burhans Hewitt was living in the stone house in 1908, the date on the postcard at right. The George Wickham family later occupied the house for many years. A half penny from the early 19th century was among the finds on this property. The Nor'easters generously contributed \$5,000 to HSM for the opportunity to search these historic properties. \$3,000 of their donation was applied to the Building Fund. We thank the club, and all of

the property owners who graciously consented to participate in this annual fundraiser. Thanks, too, to the New Kingston Valley Association for their Building Fund donation of \$100.



THE 55¢ POST

THE 55¢ POST is an exclusive feature for members who receive *The Bridge* via e-mail. Because your newsletter requires no postage, you get an "extra"!



The cast, docents, and at-large characters of the 2019 Living History Cemetery Tour included (seated, l. to r.) Nick Verni, Dave Turan, Jim Rauter, Bella, Kate, LilliAnn and John VanBenschoten; (standing) Barb Atkin, Joyce St. George, Mary Colfer, Agnes Laub, Burr Hubbell, Kelly Keck, John Bernhardt, Gretchen Walker, Amy Taylor, Eli Taylor, Anne Saxon Hersh, and director Frank Canavan. Not pictured: Tina Greene, John Exter, Lizbeth Fermin. Enjoy more moments from this year's tour on pages 4-5.

DON'T MISS THE AWESOME AUGUST SUMMER FUN!

WED

AUG

14

"It Happened in Middletown"

An original theatrical starring local thespians, written and directed by Marge Miller. A bit of mid-summer silliness, with music! Admission by donation. HSM Hall, 7 p.m.

FRI

AUG

23

"The Grange Revisited"

A talk by Amy Taylor on the influential advocacy and support organization to which every farm family once belonged. Former Grangers are warmly invited to share their memories, followed by a simple supper of soup and home-made bread. Admission by donation. HSM Hall, 5-7 p.m.

SAT

AUG

17

"Ghosts on the Land: How Hardscrabble Farmers Changed History"

A two-part program by writer/researcher Jennifer Kabat. Explore remnants of an early homestead (meet at 5:30 p.m. at 1314 Bull Run Road, Margaretville; jenkabat@gmail.com). Followed at 7 p.m. by illustrated talk at HSM Hall on the

Anti-Rent War and connections to 19th-century social upheaval worldwide. Admission by donation.

FRI

AUG

30

Retro Cruise-in on Margaretville's Main Street!

Vintage cars, vendors, food. Rock out with The Fishercats in tribute to the 50th anniversary of Woodstock! Free screening of 'Demon on Wheels,' starring Mike Ondish and his restored '68 Mustang, 7 p.m., upstairs at The Commons. Meet Mike and his local drag racing comrades at the HSM tent and sit behind the wheel of this legendary car! Period dress may win you a prize! In collaboration with Business Association of Margaretville. Main Street, Margaretville, 5-8 p.m.