

Summer at "The Shanty"

An intimate look at the beginnings of the Pakatakan Art Colony in Arkville is provided by a three-summer diary kept by Arabella Locke Wyant, an artist who was married to prominent landscape watercolorist Alexander Helwig Wyant.

The diary begins in June of 1887 when the Wyants and five-year-old son Aleck moved to the Hoffman House, a hotel built the previous year by Peter Hoffman at the urging of artist J. Francis Murphy who is credited with recruiting other artists to this 'colony' of like-minded creative types.

1887: June 30

Hoffman House, Arkville

Left Yonkers this morning by Albany boat, Nannie and Mary (Arabella's sisters) came with us in as far as Poughkeepsie, then returned by boat & I've come on to Roundout & then via Ulster & Delaware to Arkville one of the valleys in the Catskills to spend the Summer. Little Aleck very very tired with the trip. The house seems very

comfortable, no strangers here as yet, only the George Smillies, J.F. Murphy & wife & ourselves.

July 1

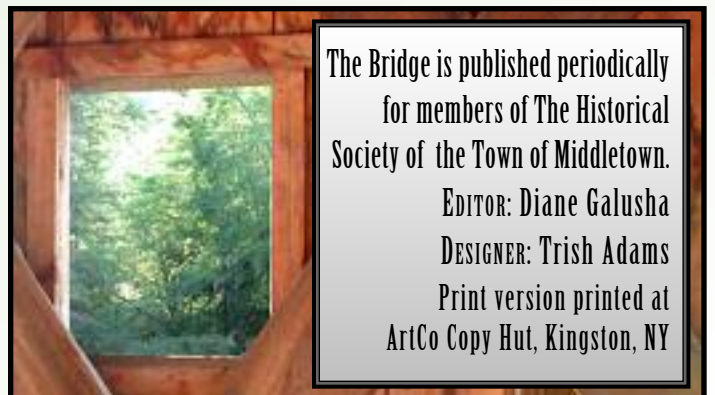
Unpacked & strolled through the woods to a little log cabin that is to be Aleck's studio. This country is beautiful but it is not the Adirondacks and I miss Keene

Valley and my own little home there. I don't think I shall ever like any other place as well. Wish we had not been so foolish as to sell it. But Aleck thinks he will find what he wants here, so if it agrees well with our boy, I shall be content.

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July 3

Aleck is going to have another room built on this log home for me, and a larger porch. I expect we shall enjoy it very much.

July 15

Our shanty is finished and very cozy with its hammock and big cozy chairs and with a few rugs we brought – lovely, quite homelike. The Van Ellens are here now and with a number of pupils of Mrs. Smillies dotted here and there through the woods we make quite a little artistic community. Everyone is interested in more or less in the same things and even the children are to be seen with their sketching books and pencils.

Aug. 17

Out sketching for an hour between five and six

Aug. 31

The children's faire came off this afternoon and was a great success. No one came but the guests and people of the house but they cleared \$6.50 for the Fresh Air Fund.

Sept. 1

Mr. and Mrs. Collier and Amy came up to the shanty & spent part of the morning with us, they are delightful people... their daughter Amy is a lovely child, bright, cultivated, with a remarkable artistic talent, yet still a simple child. I wish my little Alec might be such a child mentally & physically when he is her age.

Sept. 3

Began the first sketch in oil that I have made for three years. First Mrs. Murphy pitched into it, then Aleck, so Monday I am going to try & study it more carefully. ... Mr. Murphy has been very busy with his house building. Mr. VanEllen & Aleck work so differently. The former works out of doors most of his time & makes always careful literal studies... without much sentiment. Never painting nature's moods or even suggesting any of the mys-



Aleck Wyant at about the age he was when the family moved from the Adirondacks to the Catskills in 1887. Courtesy Alice Zigelis

terious, fleeting, tender sentiments she so constantly shows us... Aleck goes deeper, he feels and sees more... he has the construction of trees, rocks etc at his finger ends, as I have the letters of the alphabet & has a hundred different ways of beginning a picture.

Sun., Sept. 4

The morning at the shanty. In the afternoon we had the service in my room & then took a long walk. Wish we had a church here, to me it is the one great drawback to our building here, wish Aleck felt the same.

Sept. 12

My birthday, how fast they come now. Aunt Fannie & Uncle William left us today for Pine Hill. We all went with them to the train & then drove to Margaretville. The day cloudy and rainy. Only made one sketch last week and that not a good one. Found a nice subject on my walk yesterday which I hope to begin tomorrow.

Sept. 17

Nannie and Mary went to Stony Clove. Aleck & I & little Alec drove up to Hubble Brook in the morning & in the after(noon) went out sketching on the hill side near the house.

Oct. 10

Went over to Mr. Murphy's studio. He has already some lovely pictures, I like his work so much & Mrs. Murphy has made some very good studies ... We had a pleasant little visit from Mr. *(Thomas Worthington)* Whitridge *(a noted artist)* last Wed., he stayed all night. I haven't seen him for twelve years and it was very pleasant to meet him again and chat a little over old friends.

Nov. 10

Mrs. Murphy left this morning, with her this nice weather. I was out sketching every day last week ... I made 16 sketches in oil and eleven in watercolor. We have had a delightful autumn. Aleck has enjoyed it so much... He has gained five pounds and looks much better

Nov. 16

It has rained or snowed every day for a week. We all packed up to go home and we expect to leave here on Friday morning.

1888: May 16

Let little Alex go down to Atlantic City with Nannie and Mary, trusting that two weeks of good sea air before going to the mountains will prevent his having any bad streak of malaria this spring. He has had two slight ones but recovered from them much more quickly than other springs and escaped through the fall altogether ...

May 21

Aleck and I went to Metropolitan Museum to see the Wolfe collection.

May 25

Went to see Mr. Vanderbilt's collection with Miss Jenkins.

May 30

Nannie and Mary and my boy home again, he looks very brown and well & ___ will escape another attack of malaria this summer & then shall feel encouraged & shall believe he is growing out of it & stronger.

Little Aleck continued to have serious attacks of malaria that were detailed in his mother's diary.

Sun., June 18, Arkville

We are really here at last. The night before we left just after we went to bed Aleck began to be sick again & we were afraid we should not get off but it proved to be only an attack of indigestion & he was much better in the morning. There is no one here yet except the old party of last year, the J. Francis Murphys & Miss Bodine & Phil ? Palmer, the landscape painter, & Mr. Rost.

July 10

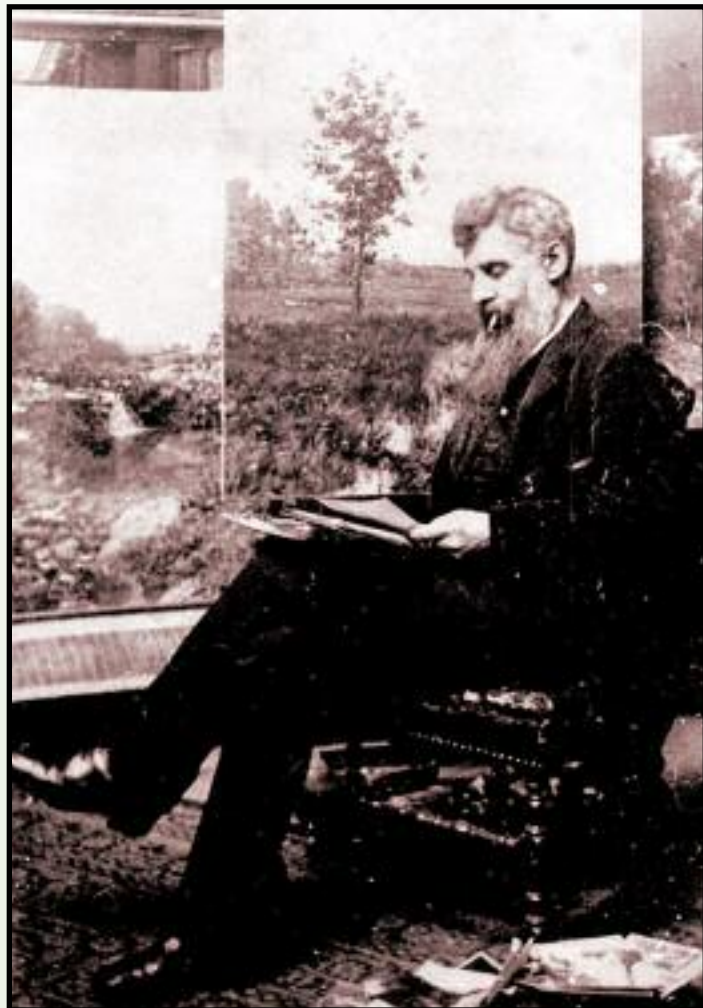
My poor little Aleck has had another attack of malaria, as usual he took sick quite suddenly. It was on the 4th & I think I let him stay out in the heat too long & perhaps his stomach was out of order. It only lasted three days but it pulled him down very much. Everyone was very kind. There are some very nice people in the house this summer & the days pass pleasantly but I do not get much work done. Mrs. Murphy has a lovely studio of her own this year and she and Miss Bodine are doing very nice work.

Aug. 10

A month has passed & I have not one sketch, Nannie & Mary are here now & so I shall not mind going off so much... the scene in Mrs. Murphys picturesque studio with its dim light and bright fire of logs was very pretty and everyone was very jolly. Mr. Walter Clark, Mr and Mrs Green, & two artist friends of the Cramers, Bodines, Murphys and four of the guests filled the little house. The night was perfect and I never saw such moon-light effect as we saw on our drive. The mist rising from the mountains made everything mysterious. I should have enjoyed that part of the evening more if Aleck & I had just been driving alone.

Oct. 25

Mr. Clark left on Monday.... they both like it so much that we hope they will build up here next summer. They will if they can get Mr. Murphy's ground and then perhaps Nannie & Mary will buy and build next to them. *(The Clarks did indeed build a cottage at Pakatakan, as did the Locke sisters, next door to the Wyants, on the site of artist Ernest Rost's cottage which burned.)*



Alexander Helwig Wyant in 1882 with some of his work. Smithsonian Archives of American Art

Nov. 9

Today the beautiful weather is all gone & I expect we will have no more of it this year. Monday or Tuesday morning we go home. No more sketching this season. I am disappointed I have not done more.

1889: May 25

We came up yesterday... I expect to get into our new house by the 1st of July...

June 1

We have had three wet days, pouring rain without ceasing. I never saw the river so swollen and the meadows are partly covered with water. Aleck & I spent most of the morning over at Mrs. Murphy's cottage. (Her) studio is lovely and her work improves all the time. My studio, indeed our whole house will be very cosy I think. There is no one here except the Murphys & Mr. Field – the latter is building a cottage too.

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June 3

Today's paper brings the most awful news from the scene of the floods in Pennsylvania. The whole town of Johnstown fairly swept away & between eight and ten thousand perish. It is the most awful thing I ever read of, indeed I could not read much, it was too heart rending & here we were comfortable, safe & happy, grumbling because three wet days interfered with our little plans.

August 3

We have been (in) our house a few days and I think we shall find it very cozy and comfortable. It seems rather lonely at night & I rather miss the evenings on the piazza at the Hoffman house where there were some very pleasant people... but I shall be very busy fixing up the house, painting.



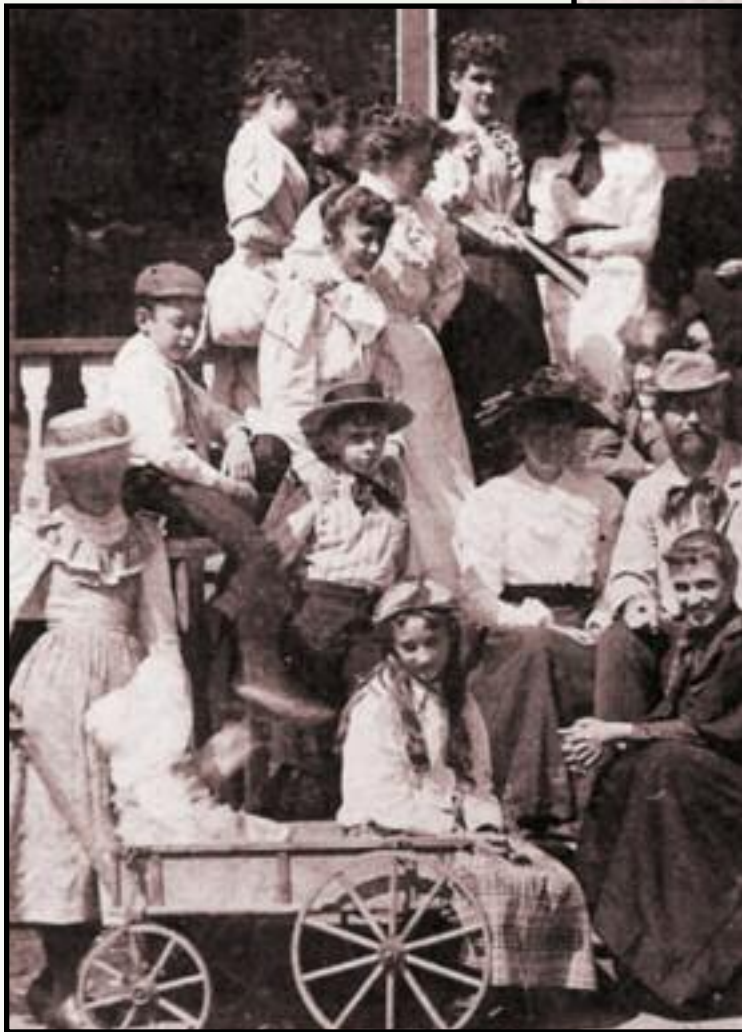
The Wyant home and studio constructed in 1889. Wikipedia

Epilogue

Alexander H. Wyant the elder died three years after this last entry at the age of 56. Son Alexander (Aleck) deLocard Wyant was just ten years old. The artist had suffered from the effects of a stroke that years earlier had caused him to learn to paint with his left hand. In 1891 he received the W. T. Evans Prize for Best Watercolor by an American Artist, and his works are in many museums, galleries and private collections today. One wonders where Arabella's sketches and paintings are.

Arabella lived for another three decades, residing in Manhattan and on a farm in Dutchess County with her unmarried sisters and son Aleck. She died in 1919 at age 78. In 1926 Aleck married Katherine Field, daughter of colony neighbor and artist E. Loyal Field and wife Flora. He died in 1946 of throat cancer, age 63. The Fields, the Murphys, Aleck and other residents of the colony are buried in Margaretville Cemetery. The "Shanty" and several other shingle-style cottages still stand and are included in the Pakatakan Artists Colony Historic District, which was named to the State and National Registers of Historic Places in 1989.

Thanks to Alice Zigelis, owner of the former Field cottage, who loaned the diary for scanning, and to Deb Kenney and Linda Armour who helped transcribe it.



A merry band of Pakatakan Colony revelers. Courtesy Margaret Leveson

Our excellent team of seasoned local contractors is moving along with the expansion of the HSM hall. If all goes well we will be moving our collection of historic materials into the new archives space by the end of the year!

The first shovel of dirt was moved May 17 by Jim Peters, and soon after the footings were poured, block foundation built and slab laid by Dean Hunter. We now have an enclosed addition with interior walls and ceiling framed by general contractors (Rob) Cole and (Gina) Griffin (pictured).

The lobby will have a cathedral ceiling; the office, rest room, reading room and archives proper will have 8-foot ceilings. Heating and cooling will be by air-source heat pumps installed by Rycor. ADA compliant bathroom fixtures will be installed by Titan Drilling.

An initial landscape design has been prepared by Birgitta and Julia Brophy encompassing the upper parking area (with handicapped space), pathway and garden leading to the roofed entry. A larger design for the rest of the property will be done next year. (We are soliciting input from the resident turkey population.)

Siding (granite color to complement the impressive boulders on the site) will be applied to the addition and the existing hall by Gary Faraci. Electrical work is by Mike Hinkley.

Once we have moved our historical collection from the Fairview Library garage to the new space, we'll spend the winter organizing it and cataloguing the accession forms which we have completed over the past three years. We hope to hold an open house in the spring.

Progress yes, but here is still much to do and we are counting on supporters to get us to the finish line! Donations made to the HSM Building Fund by the end of the year will be matched by a generous Board member so whatever you give will be doubled! All donors will be publicly recognized.

Mail your check today to HSM, PO Box 734, Margaretville, NY 12455, or visit our website (mtownhistory.org) to donate electronically. Thank you!



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Except for a brief window of sunshine when the cast photo was taken at Margaretville Cemetery, our 10th Living History Cemetery Tour got no help from Mother Nature whose rain and wind drove the actors and the audience indoors June 17. But thanks to the Open Eye Theater and the 'show must go on' attitude from all involved, the armchair version of the tour was a success.

The tour was a reunion of sorts for members of the Dumond family (below), who came from far and wide to see Rebecca Newman portray Mary Elizabeth Dumond Osborn (front center) with script written by Sue Debruin (back center).

Connie Jeffers (right) looked every bit the part of 'gypsy' Anastasia, giving audience members a vivid glimpse of the traveling Roma and their culture.





Calvin Davis' grandson Lauren Davis (right) and great-grandson Dave Morrison (left) enjoyed



Ken Taylor's portrayal of their ancestor. Kevin Brewersdorf's portrayal of young Howard Baker moved many to tears.

Remembering Our Community Builders

They built homes and barns, bridges and studios, hotels and hospitals, all the structures that make our community. But how many of them are remembered today? HSM's annual exhibit in the History Tent at the Cauliflower Festival September 23 will introduce some of these craftsmen: Crosby Kelly (Skene Memorial Library and Griffins Corners Union Free School); Scudder Whipple (the home of artist J. Francis Murphy); Henry Townsend (old Margaretville Hospital expansion); the Scott family (several barns in New Kingston and elsewhere); Frank Mead (covered bridges built and repaired); Howard Mayes (Fleischmanns Theater, Galli-Curci home); and many others.

The Cauliflower Festival runs from 11 to 4; admission is free. There will be new elements and surprises this year – don't miss it!

Margaretville, N.Y. Oct 3 1894

Mr A. J. Scott

Bought of

ALLISON & SEARLE,

DEALERS IN

General Hardware, Pine and Hemlock Lumber, Sash, Doors and Blinds,
(LUCAS PAINTS, OILS, VARNISHES, ETC.)

36 Bundles Shingles	110	39.60
53 ft pine		1.69
37 ft Nails		.94
18 ft gutter 10		1.80
Nail		.09
		\$ 44.12
Labor		13.50
		\$ 57.62

This 1894 receipt from a Margaretville hardware store itemizes material for a roofing job done by A. J. Scott for the Kittle family on Main Street. The project totaled \$57.62, and that included \$13.50 for labor.

THE 63¢ POST

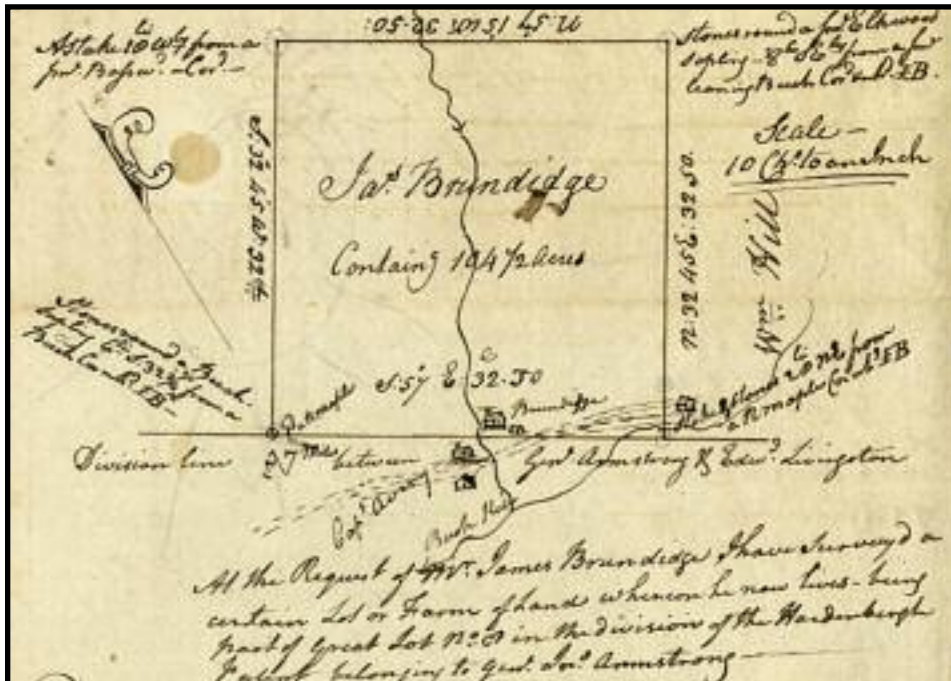
The 63¢ Post is an exclusive feature for members who receive *The Bridge* via e-mail. Because your newsletter requires no stamp, you get an “extra”!

Ringin' It Old School

Margaretville second graders with teachers and aides Melissa Pacheco, Caitlyn Roberts, Katie Camillone and Denise Williams visited the Stone Schoolhouse June 15 for a taste of one-room school life. The group learned about leaves from educator Amy Taylor, completed spelling and writing lessons and examined the outhouse which is clean and functioning, though there were no takers among the kids. Each student (including Ulalia Vasquez, pictured) had a chance to ring the venerable bell in the belfry of the 1862 building.



The “Mapster” of All He Surveys . . .



Ever wonder what a surveyor sees in his or her mind's eye when reading a document like this map and description prepared by William Cockburn for James Brundidge in 1797? Find out when Rick Brooks, a long-time surveyor and historian of his trade presents “The Hardenburgh Patent, A Surveyor's Journey” October 21 at 3 p.m. The illustrated program will be held in the Catskill Watershed Corp.'s auditorium, County Rte. 38 (Arkville cut-off road). Admission is by donation. The Catskill Water Discovery Center adjacent to the auditorium will be open from 1 to 3 for those interested in learning about the New York City water system and watershed. Rick will also lead a field walk on Oct. 22 to show how surveyors read the land. Document from Cockburn Family Papers, NYS Library Special Collections