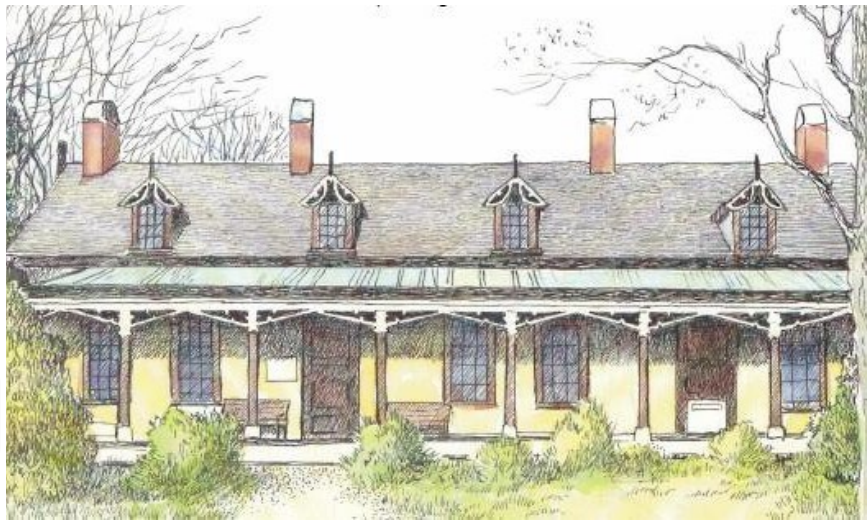


The Homestead Chronicle

VOL. 7 NO. 1 A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE WAPPINGERS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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President's Message

Dear Members,

WELCOME 2021, and I look forward to seeing you all again before too long!

While 2020 was a dark time for us all – I see the light at the end of the tunnel- and we need a little light right now!

I wanted to let you know that we have not been idle. Please allow me to “toot our WHS horn” for 2020:

We have some exciting additions to the contents of the Mesier Homestead. Thanks to a generous donation by Alison Spear and Alex Reese, 9 beautiful Victorian fans which previously belonged to Alex's mother, Franny Reese, were professionally restored and are now housed in a lovely period-appropriate display cabinet located just off the Parlor. And, thanks to a generous donation from Richard Thurston, we received several pieces of 1700's furniture. These pieces await the restoration of our colonial kitchen in the original 1741-43 portion of the Homestead.

Speaking of restoration, we have taken the first steps in the restoration process of the original structure, and look forward to foundation work beginning in the spring. We are so looking forward to eventually opening that building to the public after all the restoration is complete! (Continued on page 2)

President's Letter (Continued from page 1)

In the meantime, the main portion of the Mesier Homestead was reopened to visitors in July, with new "Signature Experience" private tours. These small, personalized private tours were very well received by our visitors. These tours will resume in the spring. Even though our visitor numbers were significantly lower than normal due to the pandemic, our online Gift Shop was a huge success. Purchases can be picked up curbside or shipped – our merchandise was regularly shipped to states like Colorado, North Carolina or Florida! Our social media fans on Facebook and Instagram continue to grow with a 300% increase in followers from this time last year. Much of this growth is attributed to Amy Hauck-Barr and her wonderful "Wappingers Wednesday" content. If you aren't already following us, please do so!

Thanks to your support, we won Best of the Hudson Valley Historical Society for the 3rd year in a row! We celebrated our members with a socially distanced summer concert in Mesier Park in August. Bryan Lammers raised our spirits with his wonderful music, and we all enjoyed the sweet taste of summer with ice cream sundaes from Chilly Willies. And a beautiful, new sign for the Mesier Homestead now graces the park entrance next to the steps by Route 9D. Have you seen it yet?

We took our first steps into the "grants" world by successfully applying for several grant opportunities. The William G. Pomeroy Foundation awarded us a technology grant with which we expanded our bandwidth and purchased laptops for working with the archives. Greater Hudson Heritage Network awarded us a Supply Grant for the purchase of needed items for our Collections. Tompkins Mahopac Bank is supporting us with \$500 to professionally film the upstairs portion of the Homestead tour so that those who are unable to go upstairs can still learn about all the wonderful contents those rooms hold.

Finally, we embraced virtual content by presenting our annual Sinterklaas holiday via video. If you haven't already seen it, this 3-part program can still be viewed on our Facebook page or website. And coming in January is our next virtual undertaking: *Pathway Through History*. This professionally filmed video features volunteer actors from WHS along with community volunteer actors from County Players and Roy C. Ketcham High School. Meet the Browsers & Mesiers, Orson Fowler, Dan Brouthers and more in this student-friendly production! Also coming in January is our Winter issue of the Homestead Chronicle – look for it in your mailbox soon!

All of these accomplishments wouldn't be possible without the efforts and support of our wonderful Board of Trustees. Thanks to them and our membership for a terrific year despite the challenges we all faced. I am so proud to be associated with such a thriving and growing organization and I look forward to continuing to find new ways to share our rich history with all of you and our community!

Beth Devine

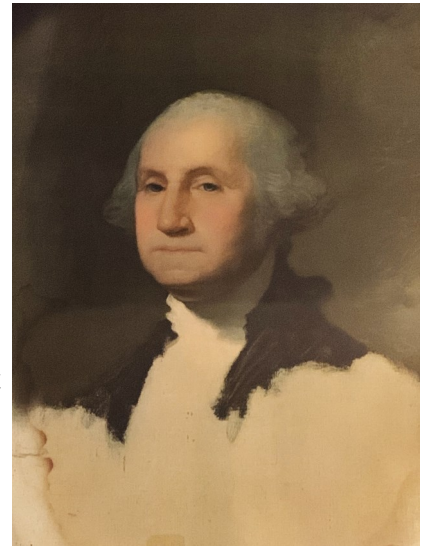
Flora Armstrong, Witness to Local History Events

The Historical Society is fortunate to house the Castro Collection in our archives. This collection consists of depositions, artifacts and genealogy related to the extended Brower family, of which Nicholas Brower Sr., builder of the Mesier Homestead and Patriot in the Revolutionary War, was a member.

Three depositions from this collection were recorded in August 1846, two of which were given by William Hughson of Fishkill and Charles Brower of Poughkeepsie. The third, by Flora Armstrong of Poughkeepsie, was not notarized, signed nor witnessed, but it is believed the handwriting was the same as the first two. The purpose of these depositions was to obtain for the Brower descendants a “reimbursement” from the United States Treasury for monies and goods given by Brower to the fight for Independence.

Of interest to our local history, these depositions tell of Nicholas Brower’s participation in the Revolutionary War. Flora Armstrong stated that she knew Nicholas during the Revolutionary War and that “his lands near the mouth of the Wappingers Creek was used in building batteaus and small vessels for the publick [sic] and that his lands was [sic] so used for three or four years; that the said Nicholas was a warm supporter of the revolution not in word only but in deed and that he furnished provision of all kind for the army at West Point and other places sutch [sic] as beef, pork, potatoes, etc. some of which was sent down by the vessels built their [sic] and some by wagons.”

Flora also “well remembers General Washington came to the house and that the said Nicholas Brower, Senior giving him a sword and pistols and horse, saddle and bridle for himself and a black servant named Harris and horse, saddle and bridle for him. Also that she well remembers the said Nicholas buying grain of several kinds of grain sutch [sic] as wheat and corn and grinding the same in his mills and sending the same to the army. And that she remembers the said Nicholas buying vast quantities of cattle and having them slaughtered and sent to the army and that he had bread baked, pies made for the sick and sent honey in the comb by the keg and butter and poultry of every description sent for the sick and wounded (and that he never received any compensation for same as he moved away in the spring of 77 and died in the fall the day Burgoyne surrendered).” The house she refers to is most likely our Mesier Homestead, as he owned the home until April 1777. George Washington was a frequent visitor to our area and West Point before he made Newburgh his residence and headquarters in 1782.



Flora Armstrong, at the time of her deposition, was 96 years old. She was a black woman who was born in Fishkill in 1750. Records are scarce for this time period, unless you were a landowner. None could be found regarding Flora besides this deposition and her obituary. She died on May 16, 1860 at the County Home in Poughkeepsie at the age of 110. Her age, being of extraordinary note, gained her posthumous fame. Her obituary was published in the Poughkeepsie Eagle and in newspapers throughout New York and New England. It noted that “last summer she enjoyed good health, and supported herself by gathering herbs and selling them through the streets of the former place.”

Filly Baisley Honored

The Wappingers Historical Society recently honored Filly Baisley, an early and long-time member of the Wappingers Historical Society, for her dedication to the preservation of local history. Mrs. Baisley's commitment and support of the Mesier Homestead, Carnwath Farms Historic Site and Park, and Mount Gulian was recognized by Historical Society President Beth Devine, Village Clerk John Karge on behalf of the Mayor of Wappingers Falls, Wappinger Town Supervisor Richard Thurston, and Dutchess County Legislator Joseph Cavaccini during a ceremony held at the Mesier Homestead on November 12, 2020.

“Filly Baisley has been a very special friend to the Wappingers Historical Society,” said Beth Devine, Wappingers Historical Society President. “Since the early years of the historical society, Filly was consistently involved in the fundraising committee, helping to organize our successful "Tea Party" events along with other fundraisers. In recent years she has been a Platinum Sponsor of The Spirit of Mesier – our annual gala in June. Through her dedication and support in our restoration efforts, the community has come to know the Mesier Homestead and the importance of preserving our history and the history of this almost 300-year-old jewel in the middle of the village. While many local businesses and many, many friends have helped us on our journey, Filly Baisley has been a constant presence and for that we are so very grateful.”

November 12th was declared “Filly Baisley Day” in both the village and town in recognition of Mrs. Baisley's dedication to several area historic sites and the greater Wappinger community. Wappinger Town Supervisor Thurston noted: “Very few people have touched the heart and soul of a community as has Filly Baisley over the years. She and her family have been a cornerstone of the Wappinger Community. Her dedication and generosity to preserving the history and culture of the Town of Wappinger and Village of Wappingers Falls can never be thanked and recognized enough. Thank you, Filly Baisley, for all that you have and will continue to do to make the greater Wappinger area a wonderful place in which to live.”

Seated: Mrs. Filly Baisley; Standing: Mrs. Beth Devine, Wappingers Historical Society President



Irving and Joanna Grinnell

Irving Grinnell was born on August 9, 1839 in New York City. He was the son of Moses Grinnell and Julia Irving. Moses Grinnell was a one term US Congressman and owner of the great New York City shipping firm, *Grinnell, Minturn & Co.* Julia Irving was the niece of Washington Irving, the famed writer. Moses and Julia built a country home in Westchester County, adjacent to Mr. Irving's home, Sunnyside, but their primary residence was on 14th Street, Manhattan.

Irving attended Columbia College. A sailor at heart, he rowed on the first crew at Columbia. He made several trips abroad as a young man of privilege would do at that time. The requisite "tours" of Europe were made, travelling through Britain, France and Spain, as well as Egypt and the Holy Land. In 1863, Irving married Joanna "Josey" Howland, daughter of NYC shipping magnate Gardner Green Howland. The Howland family resided at Netherwood, located in what is now Bowdoin Park in the Town of Poughkeepsie. After their marriage, Irving and Joanna purchased Netherwood from the widowed Mrs. Howland and it became their home.



Top: Netherwood
Above: Remains of Entrance Gate to Netherwood on Sheafe Road.

The sport of ice yachting, begun around the turn of the 19th century, was gaining in popularity by mid-century. The Hudson River froze solidly every winter, unlike today's river. Irving helped form the New Hamburg Ice Yacht Club (NYIYC) in 1869 and was its 1st Commodore, his tenure lasting for many years. He also served as Commodore of the New York Yacht Club. He built a large boathouse on the Hudson River, just below Netherwood. The footings of the boathouse are still evident in the Hudson beyond the train tracks at Bowdoin Park. It was a two-story affair, with a large deck around the entire second floor, enabling spectators to watch the yacht races. The boathouse was used as headquarters for the NYIYC for several years until the present building on Water Street, New Hamburg, was erected. Commodore Grinnell owned



Irving and Joanna Grinnell (Continued)

several yachts, some of which were named “The Flying Cloud,” “Flyaway,” and “Zero,” The “Zero” was once known as the biggest and heaviest ice yacht built, standing 30 feet from mast to rudder, 23 feet runner plank from skate to skate and weighing 2,000 lbs. He commissioned the building of “The Whiff” to display at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, PA. It was 41 feet, made of black walnut with gold beading and nickel-plated iron work. The “Whiff” was re-discovered many years ago in a barn on the old Grinnell estate and was restored by the Hudson River Ice Yacht Club. The Club still sails it today. Local newspapers were filled with stories of glorious races, especially between the Poughkeepsie club (Commodore John Roosevelt) and the New Hamburg club. In 1881, Grinnell initiated the grandest race in ice yachting history - the “Ice Challenge Pennant Competition of America,” which, ironically, he never won. By 1910, ice yachting had lost much of its prestige and popularity.

Ice yachting and sailing were only one facet of Mr. Grinnell’s life. Though he lived in the New Hamburg area, his was a very familiar face in the Village of Wappingers Falls. He developed a great friendship with Henry Yates Satterlee, of Zion Episcopal Church, who was offered the use of a cottage on the Netherwood property when he arrived as a seminarian. Irving was raised a Unitarian, but became a devout Episcopalian as a result of this friendship. He was confirmed at Zion in 1872, Joanna in 1866. In 1876, he began teaching Bible study classes in a small rented building in New Hamburg. As attendance at his classes in New Hamburg grew larger, space became dearer. The wealthy families in the Wheeler Hill and Sheafe Road areas began to feel a need for a more conveniently located church than Zion in the Village.

William Henry Reese of Obercreek began to sell subscriptions to build a chapel in New Hamburg, and the community came together



Zion Church—Note that the spires are still installed at the time of this photo.



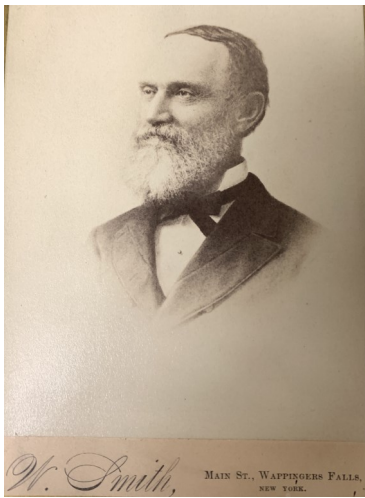
Interior of Zion Church displaying the Tiffany glass mosaics in the apse

to build Zion Memorial Chapel, now known as St. Nicholas-on-the-Hudson. The chapel was dedicated in 1901 and began holding church services and classes as an outreach for Zion Church.

It was said at the Zion window dedication in 1923 “he was an expert skater, holding his own in Lawn Tennis, and bringing to all the neighborhood a sociable and friendly spirit. With a wholesome and almost boyish enjoyment of fun sometimes to the dismay of Mrs. Grinnell, he made brighter and happier any gathering of people in which he shared.” Mr. and Mrs. Grinnell remained childless, but “adopted” the children of the area. They hosted winter sleighing parties for the girls and boys in the parish. In fact, it is said that Irving crushed his left ankle during one of these events while saving a child from danger. This injury never healed properly, crippling him and causing him great pain for the rest of his life. Yearly, he and the

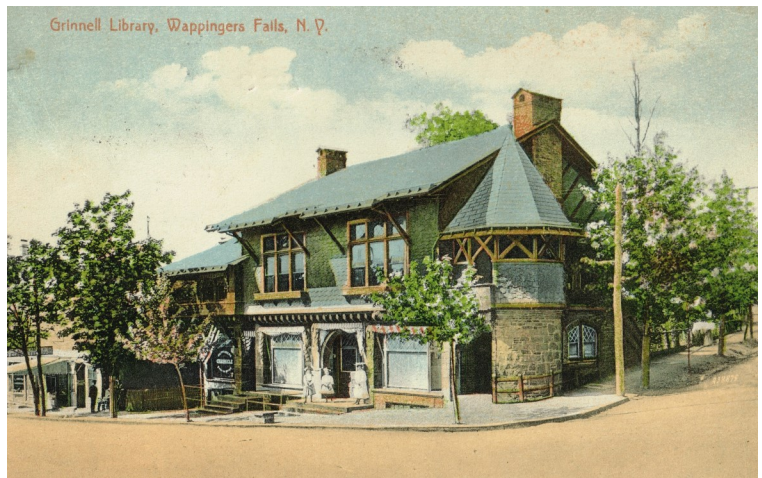
Irving and Joanna Grinnell (Continued)

Rev. Satterlee led the children in gathering trees and greens to decorate Zion Church for Christmas. It is said that Mr. and Mrs. Grinnell once hosted a party with 600 children from all of the church schools of New Hamburg, Hughsonville, and Zion. Irving organized and trained six different Zion church choirs. He not only donated his time teaching classes and serving on the vestry; he paid to have many building improvements made, such as creating a gallery, having stone arches installed, and enlarging the worship space. The Tiffany glass mosaics in the apse were a gift to the Church, as well as a window in memory of his beloved Josey, who passed in 1905. Another memorial to Joanna was a set of chimes placed in the belfry, which, even today, ring on the quarter hour.



Abram S. Mesier

The most well-known contribution from Mr. and Mrs. Grinnell is our Grinnell Library. Together with the Rev. Satterlee, they established The Circulating Library and Reading Room on May 25, 1867. It was located on the second floor of Abram S. Mesier's building at the corner of East Main and Market Streets. At its opening, the library had newspapers, magazines, and 200 books. By 1873, the Library encompassed the entire second floor of the Mesier building and had many more books. As was true of Zion Church, the burgeoning Village and Town soon outgrew the library building. In 1886, Mr. and Mrs. Grinnell purchased a plot of land for a new library building, for \$350. They established a building fund, held a lawn party at Netherwood, a church fair at Zion, and raised \$3000. Mr. Grinnell then solicited family and friends for contributions. When meeting with the architect, Henry Congdon, it was decided to style it as a Swiss chalet and to spend no more than \$15,000. Grinnell Library, on East Main Street, was opened on October 21, 1887, and management of the library was transferred to a Board of Trustees. The library occupied a portion of the second floor, with an apartment for the librarian on the back side on the first and second floors. There was a rental apartment available, as well as retail space, on the first floor. A.S. Simmons jewelry store was the first retail tenant, renting space until the 1920's. The Wappingers Chronicle occupied the basement. Upon the death of Irving Grinnell, in May 1921, the Library received a legacy in the form of \$12,000. Mr. Grinnell stipulated that "it is my desire that said sum (\$5,000) be kept invested as a permanent fund and that the income only thereof be used for the purpose of the Association." The remaining \$7,000 "as to which Mr. Grinnell expressed desire that they should be received as if coming from the estate of his wife Joanna H. Grinnell and from her personally."



Grinnell Library - 1908

Note the "Chronicle" Offices on the bottom left of the building

Irving Grinnell

M - Irving Grinnell - New Haubough 1874

1. *Your Favorite Color?* My Country's Flag!
2. *Flower?* Double extra Genesee!
3. *Tree?* The family tree!
4. *Hour in the day?* The well-spent hour!
5. *Season of the year?* Christmastide.
6. *Names, male and female?* Julian & Maud.
7. *Poets?* Shakespeare.
8. *Prose authors?* "Old Probabilities"!
9. *Character in Romance?*
10. *..... in History?*
11. *What book (not religious) would you part with last?* The "book of Memory"!
12. *Where would you best like to live?* In the loving remembrance of my friends.
13. *Your favorite occupation?* "Making hay while the sun shines"!
14. *The trait of character you most admire in man?* Moral courage!
15. *..... in woman?* Simplicity!
16. *The trait you most detest in each?* Affectation!
17. *If not yourself, who would you rather be?* A much better man!
18. *Your idea of happiness?* On an ice-boat: therm^y 10° below zero!
19. *..... of misery?* A January thaw succeeding!
20. *The sublimest passion of which human nature is capable?* Self-sacrifice!
21. *The sweetest words in the world?* "Those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."
22. *The saddest?* Farewell!
23. *Your motto?* "Know thyself"!



Grinnell and Howland (Beacon) Public Libraries

Do you know there is a connection between these two libraries? Joanna Howland Grinnell, and Civil War Brigadier General Joseph Howland were 1st cousins. They both were responsible for building the libraries in their respective hometowns. In the 1810's, their fathers, Gardener Green Howland and Samuel Shaw Howland, were the founding partners of G.G. and S.S. Howland, one of the largest shipping firms in New York City. The business imported high quality goods from China, South America, and Europe for sale to wealthy Americans. This company amassed a great fortune for the two brothers, and both retired in 1838. Gardiner Howland later became director for the Hudson River Railroad and lived along the Hudson in his estate "Netherwood" until his death in 1851.

Financial circumstances allowed cousins Joanna and Joseph to live the lives of "lady and gentleman," thus enabling them and their extended family members to give generously to causes close to their hearts. Joanna and Irving Grinnell were the driving forces behind the fundraising events (as well as their own monetary contributions) that built our own Grinnell Library in 1887. Joseph Howland was the founder and 1st President of the Howland Library, built in 1872, which is now known as the Howland Cultural Center. General Howland and his wife Eliza, in 1859, named their newly built estate "Tioranda," which was located along the Hudson just south of the city of Beacon. They were instrumental in organizing the Hudson River State Hospital for the Insane. After General Howland's death, Mrs. Howland declined to live in the mansion, and rented it out for several decades. In 1911, she deeded the entire estate to University Settlement, wishing it to be made into a boy's summer camp. A few years later, Tioranda was sold and it became an exclusive private woman's psychiatric hospital, known as Craig House.



G.G. and S.S. Howland 1840
Silhouette
Courtesy of National Picture Gallery

Special thanks to the Grinnell Library Staff for making available their files on Irving Grinnell.

New Members

Welcome to **Linda Catalina** who joined the Wappingers Historical Society in the fourth quarter of 2020.

Many thanks as well for the continued support of *all* our members.

Your continued support is greatly appreciated!



Skating on Wappingers Lake

Visit us at:

Contact us at:

info@wappingershistoricalsociety.org

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#WappingersHist

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Pathway Through History

Exciting news! Our *Pathway Through History* Film coming in January!

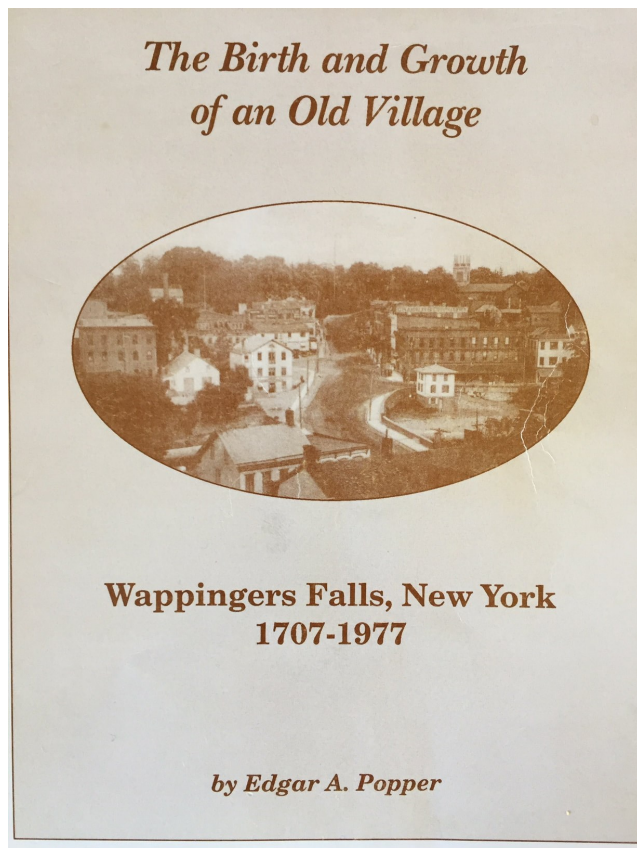
As we continue to present and share our local history virtually, look for our new short film, *Pathway Through History*, coming to a computer near you! This project is truly a community effort, with volunteer actors from Wappingers Historical Society, Wappingers Falls-based County Players and Roy C. Ketcham High School's Masque & Mime theater club coming together to portray some of the men and women who contributed to the history of the Hudson Valley. Filmed in the Mesier Homestead, costumed characters you'll meet include Nicholas Brower Sr., Pieter and Catherine Mesier, Phrenologist Orson Fowler, baseball great Dan Brothers, and friends of Sojourner Truth and Daniel Nimham.

The film "premier" date will be announced on our social media pages and in an email to our members and friends. Stay tuned!



Hometown Wappingers Items in Our Online Store

Have you read this book yet? “The Birth and Growth of an Old Village” by Edgar Popper provides a comprehensive recording of Village of Wappingers Falls history, including first land owners, prominent families, early factories, major village fires and early fire companies, churches and village businesses throughout the years. It’s a “must read” for current and past residents of the village and town!



This, and many other books about our area can be found in our online store. Visit the *HOMETOWN WAPPINGERS* shopping category of our store to see all the unique items we carry that celebrate our area!

We happily ship anywhere in the country and can ship to a gift recipient as well. Curbside pickup at Mesier Homestead is also available, and our Gift Shop at Mesier Homestead can be open by appointment, making it convenient to shop on your schedule. Just give us a call at 845-632-1281 to set up a time.

Events & Tours

All in-person meetings and Speaker Series events are cancelled, due to the current public health crisis. We will reschedule cancelled events as soon as safely possible.

When we are able to re-open, you will also begin to discover the history of the Mesier Homestead, the Village of Wappingers Falls and the surrounding Town of Wappinger during our new *Signature Experience* private tours! Go to our website www.wappingershistoricalsociety.org for up-to-the-moment information.