



Cedar Grove

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site

Vol. 8, No. 1

Winter 2008 Newsletter

Thomas Cole Historic Site Celebrates “The Year of the River”

In 1609, Henry Hudson made his historic voyage up the great wide river now known as the Hudson. Four hundred years later, New York State is launching a “Quadricentennial” celebration of the river, sponsoring and promoting events throughout the region.

The Thomas Cole Historic Site will play a key role in exploring the Hudson’s history, serving as a place to learn about one of the river’s most enduring legacies: the Hudson River School. Starting in January, we are rolling out programs that have been in the planning for years, including a new short film about Thomas Cole, funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. This year, our popular Sunday Salons will comprise a “primer” on the Hudson



Alfred T. Bricher, *Up the Hudson*, 1864. oil on canvas, 12 x 20 in. Private collection

River School, given by some of the top scholars in the field of American art. In May we will open an exhibition of 19th-century paintings of the river, accompanied by guided hikes to the locations in the paintings. The opening day speaker on May 2nd will be the cu-

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rator emeritus from the Metropolitan Museum, John Howat, who produced the blockbuster exhibition “American Paradise.” We have also been building a detailed and comprehensive educational website about Thomas Cole with over 150 Cole paintings to search and zoom in on, maps of Cole’s hiking excursions, and detailed information about seventeen of Cole’s most important masterworks. It will be a resource for all those seeking information about Thomas Cole, both nationally and internationally, starting in the spring of ’09.

Inside this newsletter you will find information about all of the programs mentioned above. We hope that you will come and enjoy this historic site and its programs throughout the year ahead.

Raymond Beecher, *Pillar of Cedar Grove, Dies at 91*

Raymond Beecher, who led the charge to save Cedar Grove, died in his home on Thursday October 9th, 2008.

Mr. Beecher was a leader in preserving Hudson Valley history for decades, and was officially proclaimed a Greene County Treasure by the Greene County Legislature in 2002. He was with the Greene County Historical Society for more than 50 years, serving as both its Chairman of the Board and its President. At the time of his passing he was Greene County Historian, Trustee Emeritus of the Thomas Cole Historic Site and a regular contributor to this newsletter.

On his desk the day he died were the first four paragraphs of an article about “Cole’s Grove”, written in his distinctive longhand script. Director Betsy Jacks and Board Chair Lisa Fox Martin had visited him six days earlier to ask for the article. We are honored to publish his last written words on page 6 of this edition.

The staff and Trustees of the Thomas Cole Historic Site will host a celebration of his life on May 9th, 2009, accompanied by the planting of a tree in his honor. We welcome the participation of all who knew him. He will be greatly missed.



Raymond Beecher at the 2001 opening of Cedar Grove – a restoration project that he made possible.

Online Thomas Cole Center

Over 150 paintings by Thomas Cole will be available in high-resolution format online at the new “Explore Thomas Cole” website to be launched in April 2009. The project is funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities as part of an educational program that will be installed throughout the historic site. The online programs will be available from terminals in the Visitor Center and from any computer around the world.



The website is being designed to engage novices and experts alike, with different “pathways” to explore the large quantity of information that has been written and researched by a team of scholars led by Professor Karen Lucic at Vassar College in partnership with the Thomas Cole Historic Site. The three pathways are “Take the Interactive Tour”, “Visit the Virtual Gallery,” and “Journey through Cole’s Landscapes.”

The “Interactive Tour” is a guided experience, taking visitors through a selection of Cole paintings and providing in-depth information about each. The “Virtual Gallery” module is designed to be a self-guided experience. Visitors can click on any image to see it large and then zoom in on any detail. Paintings will be searchable by date, subject matter, location, and keyword, and can be placed side-by-side for comparison. The Virtual Gallery is intended to grow each year, encompassing an ever-greater number of Cole paintings.

The last module, “Journey through Cole’s Landscapes” allows the user to explore Cole’s sketching and painting sites in the Hudson River Valley, and will connect to the Hudson River School Art Trail website which is already online at www.thomascole.org/trail.

Professor Lucic’s research team includes the students Eleanore Neumann, Elizabeth Gardner and Elizabeth Brown-Stein. The scholars Alan Wallach of the College of William and Mary and Lee Vedder of the Allentown Art Museum serve as consultants on the project, and the computer programming is being implemented by Historicus, a new media firm that specializes in interactive programming for museums, academic institutions, and cultural organizations.

Film Production Gets Under Way



During the week of September 8th, the Thomas Cole Historic Site was turned into a film set as filmmakers Eric Taylor and Jaime Bernanke – plus costume designers, art directors, make-up artists, camera men, set movers, and actors – descended on Cedar Grove to shoot footage for the new short film about Thomas Cole. The film project is part of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities that was awarded to the Thomas Cole site in August 2007. The film will premiere in the spring and be shown in the visitor center starting on opening day of the new season, May 2nd 2009.

The 12-minute film will explore Thomas Cole’s approach to landscape painting in a condensed way focusing particularly on his search for picturesque views via sketching trips he took throughout the Catskill Mountains and Hudson River Valley region. The film will illustrate how he translated his field sketches of those views into finished works in his studio and imbued them with resonant historical associations, moralizing narrative, and what he believed to be universal truths about mankind. Opening with a brief overview of the inspirational role Cole played in the formation of the Hudson River School, the film will then home in on the various stages of his artistic process, incorporating Cole’s own words as narration.

The film will be premiered at a special event on Main Street in Catskill in partnership with the Catskill Gallery Association on April 18, 2009.



2009 Exhibition: River Views of the Hudson River School



Arthur Parton, *Mount Merino*, 1865. oil on canvas, 12 x 20 in. Private collection

The Hudson River held and continues to hold deep symbolism as America's first river, encompassing both America's first vacation route and first industrial route. The inclusion of the Hudson River in a 19th-century painting was therefore often resonant with meaning. Next year's exhibition of 19th-century views of the Hudson River will explore the artists' choices regarding depictions of the river and its related bodies of water, especially in the region of Catskill.

The exhibition of these Hudson River paintings presents a unique opportunity to display the works of major 19th century landscape artists in a venue in the midst of the sites that inspired them, and a series of guided hikes will be offered to scenes in the paintings.

The opening day speaker on May 2nd will be Dr. John Howat, the curator who retired in 2001 after 33 years at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, during which time he spearheaded the expansion of the museum's American Wing. Dr. Howat is credited with catapulting the Hudson River School into the public eye with his 1972 book *The Hudson River and Its Painters*, and the 1987 blockbuster exhibition and catalogue *American Paradise*. One of his last exhibitions at the Met was the ambitious *Art and the Empire City: New York, 1825-1861* (2000). He's one of the most knowledgeable speakers today regarding the Hudson River School, and we are delighted to have him as the speaker to open our 2009 exhibition.



Richard W. Hubbard, *The Top of Kaaterskill Falls, Autumn*, 1866, oil on canvas, 15 7/8 x 13 1/4 in.

Guided Hikes

We are pleased to announce a new program of docent-led hikes to sites on the Hudson River School Art Trail – a driving and hiking trail of the views in 19th-century landscape paintings. The 2009 hikes will be coordinated with the paintings in our exhibition, including the place depicted in the painting at right.

During the past six months, Cedar Grove's Education Coordinator, Gregory Rosenthal, in partnership with Dr. Kevin Avery, curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, has researched and written over 40 pages of historic accounts and hidden stories about the sites on the trail. For example, visitors to Kaaterskill Falls will hear the story of the first white visitors to the site in 1753, as told by the explorers themselves in a surviving first-hand account. Hikers will learn of Silas Scribner, the mill dam operator who



Ernest Lotichius, *Falls of the Kaaterskill*, 1857. oil on canvas, 30 x 24 1/2 in. Private collection

controlled the flow of water, starting and stopping the waterfall for a fee for tourists. Although the 19th century tanning industry crept up to the bottom of Kaaterskill Falls, hikers will be able to see old-growth hemlocks that still remain on the steep cliffs beside the falls, unreachable by the hands of industry.

The guided hike program is part of a new initiative entitled the Carol T. Savage Art Trail Docent Program, through which a corps of docents will be trained with the rich new material that Gregory has developed. The late Carol Theodos Savage was Chairman of the Board 2004-05 and was a great friend and passionate believer in the Thomas Cole Site. The schedule of guided hikes will be announced in early 2009.

Happening at Cedar Grove: A Summary of News and Events

Summer Party Raises a Record \$52,000

The 2008 "Pic-Nic" event on July 19th raised over 20% more funds for Cedar Grove than the 2007 party, which itself was up 15% over the previous year. Cedar Grove would like to thank our supporters for being with us! The event, which features a cocktail party on the grounds of the historic site followed by privately hosted dinner parties at some of the area's loveliest homes, would not be possible without the generous donations of our nineteen gracious dinner hosts and all of our in-kind donors including the talented Douglas Koch and his magnificent flowers and Domeney's Liquors of Great Barrington. A special thanks to our Platinum, Gold, and Silver Sponsors who helped us break our fundraising records, and to Lisa Fox Martin, the event chair who made it all happen.



Above - Board Vice-Chair Hudson Talbott welcoming Catskill Mayor Vincent Seeley and his wife Gwen Seeley.



Above - Event Chair and Board Chair Lisa Fox Martin under the welcome tent with the crowd.



The late Raymond Beecher, Trustee Emeritus and Greene County Historian with Hudson designer Hilary Hillman.

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Right - Floral designer Douglas Koch.



Below - Executive Director Betsy Jacks with Kevin Avery, Curator of American Painting and Sculpture, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Pic-Nic Hosts

Jared Aswegan & Brigit Binns
 Jean & Richard Bassin
 Pamela & Theodore Belfor
 Frank Faulkner & Philip Kesinger
 Lisa Fox Martin & Dick May
 Mary Ellen & John Gallagher
 Geoff Howell
 Peter O'Hara & John Garofalo
 Mario Pollan & Kevin Moran, (p.m.) wine bar, Hudson
 Janeen Sarlin
 Betsy & Alfred Scott
 Warner Shook & Frank Swim
 Matthew Talomie & Michael DeLellis
 Marianne van Lent & Nicholas Goldsmith
 Barbara Walter & Bob Reithner
 Brooke & Malcolm Travelstead
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 Reggie Young & Nora Johnson
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Happening at Cedar Grove: A Summary of News and Events

Celebrating our Interns



On September 13, an Intern Symposium took place featuring ten current undergraduate and recently graduated students who had participated in the internship program at Cedar Grove between 2004 and 2008. Participants came from Bard College, Mount Holyoke College, SUNY New Paltz, Vassar College, Green Mountain College, and Williams College. Questions and answers were led by Kevin Avery, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Linda Ferber, The New-York Historical Society; and Elizabeth Kornhauser, The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. Past and present interns pictured above, clockwise from left: Caroline Gillaspie, Jessica Kornheisl, Elizabeth Brown-Stein, Simon Kawitsky, Rebecca Slutzky, Eleanore Neumann, Kaitlin Manning, Elizabeth Gardner, Xiao Situ, and Lowell Clare. A special thanks to Purcell Palmer for spearheading this new initiative.

4th Graders at Thomas Cole's Home



On September 22, over 100 4th grade students enjoyed a morning at Cedar Grove. Here one group is pictured sketching under the 200-year-old Honey Locust tree.

Twenty Cole Paintings on View



Thomas Cole, *Sketch for Departure*, 1837. oil on panel. Private collection

The 2008 exhibition at Cedar Grove addressed the subject of Thomas Cole's "oil sketches", a relatively unknown aspect of Cole's artistic output and process. The show included twenty-one artworks by Cole, and eleven paintings by several of his followers, including Frederic Church, Albert Bierstadt, and Sanford Gifford. Also on display were evocative instruments of Cole's craft including his paint brushes, traveling sketch box, and palettes still covered with paint.



Thomas Cole, *Kaaterskill Falls*, 1826. oil on canvas. Graham Williford Foundation for American Art, Fairfield, TX



Installation in the Catharine Beecher Gallery

Dr. Eleanor Jones Harvey, Chief Curator at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, spoke at the opening day event, centering her talk on the thesis that Cole was the true pioneer in the practice of working outdoors. In the essay that she contributed to the exhibition catalogue she notes, "Cole was hailed by Dunlap in 1834 as the first American artist to work directly from nature, and he wrote, in doing so, Cole 'had found the right path, and . . . had found the true mode of pursuing it.' Such accolades effectively laid the groundwork for the standards by which all American landscape painting would be judged for decades to come."

Raymond Beecher's Last Article

The following four paragraphs were on Mr. Beecher's desk when he died, written as a new introduction to the article that follows, which was published in the journal of the Greene County Historical Society in 1980. For 2009, the year of the river, we reprint this article that connects Thomas Cole's home to the river, reminding us that Cedar Grove once consisted of over 100 acres. The property's river frontage was sold in 1901.

John Alexander Thomson (1778-1846) in the settlement of his brother Thomas T. Thomson's estate, had reason to believe he could live out the remaining years of his life as a "Country Gentleman" at Cedar Grove. Unfortunately, his idyllic life style, one which included sharing Cedar Grove with adoring nieces, was to be jolted out of its complacency by two financial disasters. The first involved an unfavorable legal decision relating to claims chargeable to his brother's estate, and the second later came with investment losses due to the panic of 1837.

To raise urgently needed capital "Uncle Sandy" Thomson resorted to mortgaging his Cedar Grove property. Thomas Cole was also helpful in the purchase of two acres although that purchase and sale gave Uncle Sandy the right to repurchase when his finances improved. That never happened and Maria Cole and her sisters inherited Cedar Grove as well as its mortgage.

Reaching adulthood, son and nephew, Thomas A. Cole,

took on the responsibility of raising and marketing Cedar Grove's fruit crop. Artist Frederic Church was also helpful to widow Maria Cole by marketing some of her husband's artwork and by providing some employment to Theodore Cole for supervision of landscape improvements at the Mount Merino site. Emily Bartow would decorate and sell china.

Just when the Cole family decided to utilize some of their Hudson River acreage for a public picnic grove is still uncertain but in the last quarter of the nineteenth century "Cole's Grove" had become a very popular daytime picnic area for both local families and church Sunday School and other groups arriving by chartered smaller steamboats. Dockage was arranged with the nearby Catskill Village waterworks. The Cedar Grove family found the money to have constructed a sheltered pavilion, bathhouses, picnic tables, etc. Large illustrated posters were distributed for promotional purposes.

COLE'S GROVE – A FAVORITE SPOT ON THE HUDSON RIVER

By Raymond Beecher



Photographs from the Florence Cole Vincent Memorial Collection of the Greene County Historical Society

"Workmen have begun tearing down the pavilion in Cole's Grove this week. The other buildings will also be razed." The *Examiner*, in announcing the end of this popular summer park on the Hudson at Catskill, in the spring of 1901 would further comment:

"Cole's Grove for many years has been popular not only with Catskill people who have used it as a picnic ground but excursions from places along the river have been coming here for a long time." Slocum Howland, for \$10,500, had purchased the grove land roughly "bounded on the south by the public road (High Street) and the lands of the Catskill Water Works, on the east by the waters of the Hudson River, on the north by the lands of the Catskill Water Works and on the west by Colewood Avenue, including the riparian rights."

Cole's Grove was a pleasant scenic spot with its pine woods, the never-failing spring, its river beach, as well as the wooden pavilion and the bathhouses. The steamboat dock was an added convenience for visitors who came by water. Manager Theodore Cole had added

electric lights for the 1896 season with current supplied by the Catskill Illuminating and Electric Power Company.

Few activities at Cole's Grove missed the reporting staff of the *Examiner* and the *Recorder*. They would note the use of the steamboat dock by the *W. W. Whitney*, the *Isabella*, and the barge *A. M. Church*. These boats brought excursionists from as far away as Troy on the north and Poughkeepsie on the south. The season at the grove usually opened July 4, a day reserved for the use of local residents. But thereafter Theodore Cole scheduled reservations for numerous groups, while providing music for dancing, selling refreshments and supplying other family attractions.

This river site was especially

Ray's article continued.....

popular with Sunday School superintendents who brought their church groups from Athens, Hudson, Newburgh, Albany, Wappingers Falls and elsewhere. Private parties also contracted for the use of Cole's Grove for special affairs. William and Helen Phillips entertained their friends with a dancing party; the Ladies Guild of St. Luke's Episcopal Church of Catskill held a strawberry festival one year, receipts totaling \$110. During the summer of 1895, YMCA religious services of the "open air" variety were held on Sunday afternoons. Speakers included the Reverend R. H. Collins, the Reverend Lester Leggett and the noted female evangelist, Maggie Newton Van Cott.

The river presented a limited haz-



ard to Grove users. On a Saturday in August, 1897, Miss Grace Kline of Hudson had a narrow escape from drowning when she fell from the gang plank of the Steamer *Isabella*. Captain Sherwood Whitbeck made a daring plunge overboard and succeeded in keeping her above water until a rowboat was pushed around to his relief.

Into this the young woman was as-

sisted; later she was placed aboard the little steamer...taken home, not much the worse for her unpleasant experience.

But by May 1, 1901 it was all a matter of history – the land was taken over for private purposes, the buildings were gone, and families and organizations were forced to look elsewhere for a favorite picnic spot.

(Research by Editor Raymond Beecher)

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For further particulars apply to
THEO. A. COLE,
Catskill, N. Y.

Thank you for being there!


Dear Friends,

I am writing to you with a special appeal in an unusual year. The Thomas Cole Historic Site has been open just seven years, and receives no operating support from the State or Federal government. Friends like you are our main source of support. We are asking you this year to please consider a special gift to help us cover the ubiquitous cuts in non-profit funding.

If you would like to make a contribution in memory of Raymond Beecher you may use the form at the right. Please also come to a special celebration of his life on May 9th. Contributors will be acknowledged in the program that day.

I'd like to thank you for cheering us on as we have grown and blossomed.

Sincerely,


Lisa Fox Martin
Chair, Board of Governors

Enclosed is my gift of:

\$1000 \$500 \$250 \$100 \$50 or

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Please send checks to:

The Thomas Cole Historic Site, PO Box 426,
Catskill, NY 12414.

Thank you for your support.

Schedule of Sunday Salons

We join in the 2009 celebration of the Hudson River with river-themed lectures by major scholars – one each month from January through April – adding up to a “master class” on the Hudson River School. The speakers are leaders in their respective fields, and it might be another 399 years before you have another opportunity like this! Lectures are given on Sundays at 2 pm. Admission is \$9 or \$6 for members and is first-come-first-served.

January 11 Frances F. Dunwell
The Hudson: America's River

What better way to begin the Quadricentennial than with the author of the newest extraordinary book on the Hudson River? Dunwell has dedicated over 30 years to conserving the natural and historic heritage of the Hudson River. She writes, “There is a certain magic about the Hudson River ... a kind of magnetism that attracts visionary people and inspires them to do extraordinary things... Its currents run deep in our national character.” Her talk will be followed by a book-signing.

February 8 John Stilgoe
Framing Cole: The Years Before Rediscovery

Stilgoe, Professor of Visual and Environmental Studies, Harvard University, is known from his nine books as well as his feature on “60 Minutes”. Like Thomas Cole, Dr. Stilgoe

is a keen observer of nature and our historical relationship to it. Today we acknowledge Cole’s seminal role in American culture, but a question that Stilgoe addresses is why Cole was forgotten for over 100 years. A reception will follow in art galleries on Catskill’s historic Main Street co-hosted by the Catskill Gallery Association.

March 15 Patricia Junker
The Course of Empire: The Erie Canal and the New York Landscape

Junker, Curator of American Art, Seattle Art Museum, explores how the Canal Era fulfilled the prophecy of cyclical history set down by Cole in his series *The Course of Empire*, offering insights into the nature of the American character. A prolific writer and lecturer, Junker comes with fresh ideas about the mysteries that make Cole’s paintings products of a time and place in America that has shaped our own time and place so significantly.

April 5 J. Gray Sweeney
The Natural Divinity of the Hudson River

Nowhere does Thomas Cole have a more devoted scholar than J. Gray Sweeney, Professor of Art History, Arizona State University, who was one of the last people to stand in Cole’s New Studio before it was torn down. For this talk, Dr. Sweeney will examine the legacy of Thomas Cole in American landscape painting in the years after his death, and reveal Cole’s enormous influence on the formation of the Hudson River School.

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