



# The Backbone

A publication of the Backbone Ridge History Group of  
Schuyler, Seneca, and Tompkins Counties

BECAUSE HISTORY MATTERS

## HISTORY OF THE BACKBONE RIDGE TIMELINE IN PANELS

BY BETH BEVARS

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

History of the Backbone Ridge Timeline in Panels	1,4
President's Update	2
Finger Lakes National Forest	3, 7-10
Silas Halsey Marker Dedication	5
BRHG Research Room Fundraising	6
Silas Halsey Dedication	11
Cynthia Neale Program	12

In 2018, my dad, Allan Buddle submitted a funding proposal to the Nelson B. Delavan Foundation for a new project – a panel timeline of the Backbone Ridge. The project was funded but, due to Dad's illness and death, and then to the pandemic, we are just now bringing it to completion. In this edition of the newsletter, you will see the last 3 of 6 panels that were beautifully realized by local artist Chris Wolff. (Panels 1-3 were in the Winter 2022 newsletter.) *Editors Note: the panels are also depicted below.*

As written in the Delavan grant, the panels are a segmented timeline of history of the Backbone Ridge. The periods included are:

Native American: prior to European settlement  
Settlement (1790- 1830)

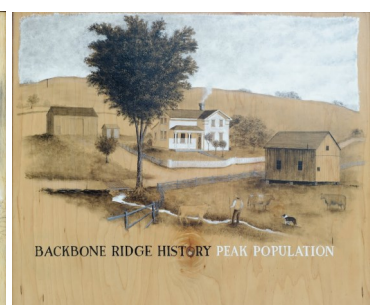
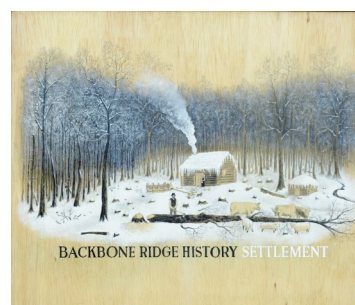
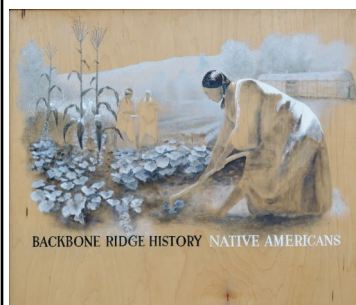
Peak population which occurred in 1850

Period of mechanization in agriculture and the home (Civil War to early 1900's)

Abandonment and Resettlement (Early 1900s to 1930s and 40s)  
Public Land Use including Grazing (1940s to present)

The panels were conceived as six individual framed exhibit boards each 4 feet high by 2 feet wide. The artwork makes up the top of each panel with space left below for optional, interchangeable displays pertinent to each different event. 6 beautiful easels made by Harold Bush provide secure display for indoor or outdoor use.

The panels will be displayed at the Lodi Whittier Library one at a time over the course of the next few months. They are beautiful works of art as well as valuable additions to the historical conversation about each period. I'm confident that Dad would be thrilled with them. Thank you to all who worked so hard to turn the vision into reality.

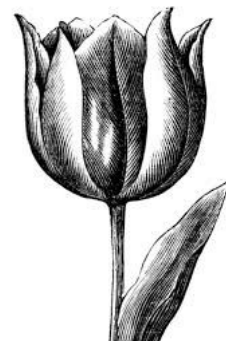


(continued on page 4)

Greetings to Backbone Ridge History Group members and readers of this newsletter!

I'm so happy to be back home in the Backbone Ridge area after spending winter months in Florida. Florida was enjoyable but there is nothing to compare with home! The arrival of spring here in the Finger Lakes is a such a joy! I surely would hate to miss the annual show. Arriving at home, one of the first things I saw was the crocuses in full bloom—the harbingers of spring to come, and I had not missed them!. And now almost three weeks later there is nothing subtle about spring here. The daffodils have bloomed, the flowering trees, the forsythia have all begun their show, the grass is tall enough to be mowed, the leaves on various trees are showing different stages of budding and different shades of green and yellow green. Life here is bursting forth with renewal.

Hoping to be in tune with what is happening in nature, the Backbone Ridge History Group is beginning a new year of program offerings to the public. We have two historical presentations planned and two musical events, and as a finale for our programming year, we plan a community dish to pass supper with music and a speaker. Our first event for this year will be a presentation by Cynthia G. Neale about Queen Catharine of Montour, the main character of her just published historical novel, *Catharine: Queen of the Tumbling Waters*, at Logan's Landmark (the Logan Community Center) on Sunday June 11<sup>th</sup> at 2 PM. A flyer can be found elsewhere in this newsletter. For times and particulars about our other programs stay tuned.



The Reynoldsville cemetery clean-up has been planned for May 20<sup>th</sup>. We are hoping we have a good turn out of volunteers for this. We held our annual meeting on April 13th, and had our election of officers. Officers remain the same this year: President—Charlotte Dickens; Vice-President—Harold Bush; Secretary—Sandra Bradford; Treasurer—David Smith. Trustees—Mark Brown, William Sebring, and the officers are also trustees of the board. We have room for more trustees, so if anyone is interested in becoming a trustee, please be give me a call at 910-988-2268 (cell). As always, we welcome submissions for the newsletter on topics related to history of the Backbone Ridge (area between Seneca and Cayuga Lakes) and its surrounds. Our e-mail address is: [backboneridgehg@gmail.com](mailto:backboneridgehg@gmail.com) or you can call me at 910-988-2268 with your idea for a submission. Our mailing address is: The Backbone Ridge History Group, P.O. Box 62, Trumansburg, NY 14886.

There are a number of things that we need to do for upkeep and maintenance upgrading for our building in Lodi. So in another section, we have detailed some of our needs and fundraising goals. Donations will be gratefully accepted.

Thanks to Beth Bevars for her continued help on the newsletter, to Kari Milliman Gauntt for her help with the layout, to Mark Brown for his work as coordinator of programs that educate and entertain our audiences and members, for the group that has worked so hard on transcribing of the 1790 surveys of the military lots and everyone who has worked and volunteered their time and energy to keep this group viable and working towards keeping the Backbone history alive. We also so greatly appreciate the grants so generously awarded to us by the Nelson B. Delavan Foundation that have greatly assisted us in our endeavors.

May we always have a sense of renewal each year!

Charlotte Dickens  
President



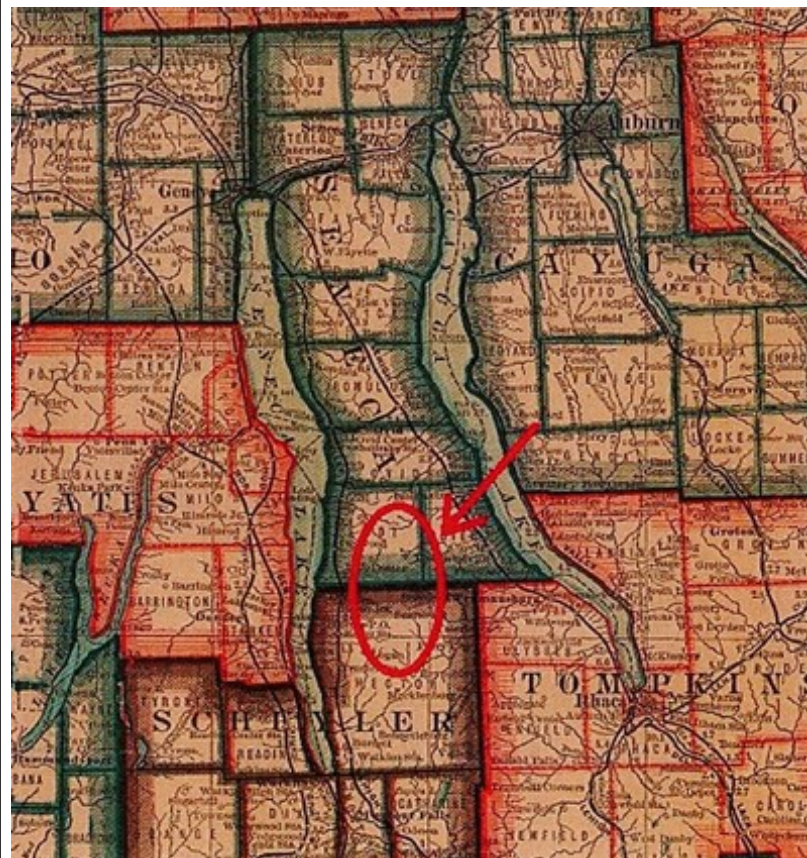
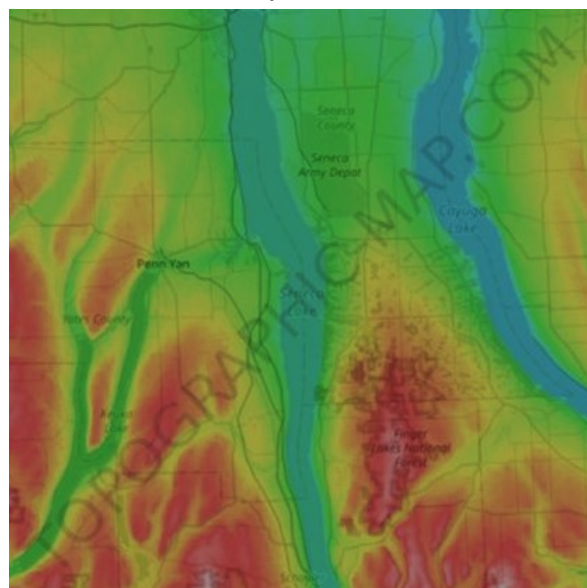


The only national forest in all of New York State is the Finger Lakes National Forest of southern Seneca County and northern Schuyler County. Now, you may think of the Adirondack Forest, but that is a state forest and not a national forest.

The area that comprises the Finger Lakes National Forest has been referred to as “Backbone Ridge.” This area between Seneca Lake and Cayuga Lake has a significant rise in elevation as you get further away from either of these 2 lakes until there is a

“ridge point” or peak and then a decline in elevation, continuing on to the other lake. That ridge or highest level of elevation between the 2 lakes, and the surrounding area, is what has become known locally as the “backbone ridge.” The Finger Lakes National Forest comprise a little over 16,000 acres of this Backbone Ridge area.

United States National Forests typically have 3 kinds of purposes. One is to preserve a natural area so that people can enjoy its natural beauty and for recreational purposes. Second, a national forest can also provide a refuge area for natural wildlife. Third, a national forest can provide a valuable economic source—such as timber and lumber, or a grazing area for commercial livestock. All three of these are clearly true for the Finger Lakes National Forest.



To begin to discuss the history of this area, for several centuries it was lands of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois). After the American Revolution, whites began to settle in this area as farmers. The soil was very fertile, and the lands were more and more intensely farmed. By about 1900, the typical farmers in the Backbone Ridge were making a marginal living at best. The soil was large depleted, and the area was finding it increasingly difficult to compete with the large-scale farms of the Midwest. With this economic hardship, there was a population decline in the Backbone Ridge area, and many of the farms were simply abandoned.

(continued on page 7)



## HISTORY OF THE BACKBONE RIDGE TIMELINE IN PANELS

BY BETH BEVARS  
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Editors Note: The three new panels unveiled!



BACKBONE RIDGE FARMING & HOUSEHOLD MECHANIZATION



BACKBONE RIDGE HISTORY RESETTLEMENT



BACKBONE RIDGE TODAY FOREST & GRAZING

**SILAS HALSEY—  
NYS HISTORICAL MARKER  
TO BE DEDICATED  
IN LODI ON SATURDAY, JUNE 3RD AT 3:00 PM**

Lodi's First NYS Historical Marker, funded by the William G. Pomeroy Foundation, is set to be dedicated on Saturday, June 3rd. The festive dedication ceremony will be held at the Silas Halsey home at 8375 N Main St in Lodi, beginning at 3pm. Please join us in celebrating the life and legacy of Silas Halsey.

In April 1792, with two associates, Silas Halsey left his house in Southampton to explore this then wild wilderness county with a view of removing his family to it, at some future time for a permanent residence.

Going to New York and from thence up the Hudson River to Albany, in a sloop, (that being then, almost the only mode of traveling, to that place he passed the carrying place to Schenectady thence in a "bateau" up the Mohawk River to Fort Stanwix (Rome) - then through Oneida Lake - down it outlet to the Seneca Ridge up that river and outlet to Seneca Lake and up the lake to "Cooley's Point (Lodi Landing) where he arrived some time in the month of May 1792.

After building a log cabin - sowing some six acres of wheat on land reclaimed from the forest wilderness and planting a nursery with about a quart of apple seeds obtained from the occupant of the old Indian orchard at Cooley's Point - then so called he returned home in October, by the same route and means of conveyance that he went out.

In May of 1793, in like manner he removed his family to his log cabin house in military township of Ovid (now Lodi).

Halsey held many public offices during his lifetime. In March of 1794, Onondaga County was erected, and he was appointed one of the Judges of the first organized county court. During the years 1794 - 5 - 6 he was elected supervisor of the town of Ovid - in 1796 - 7 - & 8 he was a member of the assembly in Onondaga County - Soon after the erection of Cayuga County (1799) he was elected in 1800 - 1 - 3 & 4 a member of assembly in that county. In 1801 he was elected a delegate to the convention for the purpose of considering the parts of the constitution of the State respecting the number of senators and members of assembly and also for the purpose of considering and determining the true construction of the 23 articles of the constitution of this State, relative to the right nomination to the office.

On the erection of the county of Seneca, March 29, 1804 - he was appointed clerk of that county. In April of 1804, he was elected a member of the 9th Congress from the 17th congressional district of the State.

In 1808 he was elected state senator (to fill a vacancy) and served one year. He continued to hold the office of clerk of the county, until April 6, 1813, when he was removed by a federal cousin of appointment.

In 1815 he was reappointed as clerk, and held the office until 1819, when he resigned.

He continued to reside on the farm on which he first settled in 1793, nearly forty years and until his death which was on the 19th day of November 1832, in the 90th year of his age. He is buried at Old Halsey Cemetery (Old Lodi Village Burial Grounds) in Lodi, NY.

President's Note: A huge thank you to BRHG Board Member and Town of Lodi Historian, Mark Brown, for his efforts to get this Marker. We look forward to the dedication on June 3<sup>rd</sup>!!

### Help the BRHG improve our Research Room!

The BRHG is a grass roots organization whose mission is to collect the history of the land and the people in the Backbone Ridge area. Realizing that the history of this area prior to the Great Depression might be forgotten, and even lost, with the death of so many of the residents, the Backbone Ridge History Group (BRHG) was formed in 2010.

The group was blessed with the gift of a "home" the former Charles Jennings Law Office by way of Charles' daughter Amy. The building is located in Lodi, next to the old library.

Our goal is to create a research room for Backbone Ridge and other relevant local history.

### ***WE NEED YOUR HELP!***

In April of 2021 a spring storm damaged the west portion of the roof. We need to fix this. We got money from our insurance but it will not cover the whole cost of a new roof which is necessary.

We also have a "critter" problem in the way of squirrels in the ceiling. Both issues require attention very soon.

For these reasons, we are starting a Fundraising Campaign with the goal of raising \$20,000 before July 4th 2026, the 250th anniversary of our nation's birth.

In addition to the roof and "critter" problems listed above, there are other issues that the Backbone Ridge History Group would also like to address including:

- upgrade to the heating system,
- repair the porch and crumbling steps,
- reframe the back door,
- replace broken floor tiles,
- upgrade to the lights
- install a drain pipe for the sink,
- improve the bathroom,
- remove overgrown trees
- and most importantly, make the office handicap accessible.

We are going to address these things as aggressively as possible but realize that life is often a one step at a time experience.

We ask your support of any future fundraising and welcome donations. Donations can be made by check and mailed to our P.O. Box.

We hope that you will be able to see some progress on this gauge with each newsletter.

**Goal \$20,000**

**\$15,000**

**\$10,000**

**\$5000**

**JAN 1, 2023**

**\$4000**



## THE FINGER LAKES NATIONAL FOREST

BY SENECA COUNTY HISTORIAN WALTER GABLE  
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

### Uncovering the History of the Backbone Ridge and the Finger Lakes National Forest

- Following the Revolutionary War, European Americans (white) settlers moved into this area which had been lands of Iroquois tribes for many years.
- These white settlers cleared portions of land for production of hay & small grains such as buckwheat.
- More clearing of land & more intensive agricultural production
- Until about 1900 these farmers largely prospered, but by 1900 they suffered from soil depletion & increased competition from Midwest
- 1850-1900 – population of towns of Hector & Lodi dropped from 8,321 to 5,773
- 1890-1930s – over a million acres of farmland abandoned in south central NY

In 1935, Congress passed the Emergency Relief Administration Act. Using that law, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 7027 to create the Resettlement Administration. This Resettlement Administration was authorized to buy the farms of farmers willing to sell, with the assumption that these families would relocate to where they could do productive work. Farmers did not have to sell their farms, but over 100 farm families in the Backbone Ridge chose to sell their farms between 1938 and 1941. Fifty-eight of

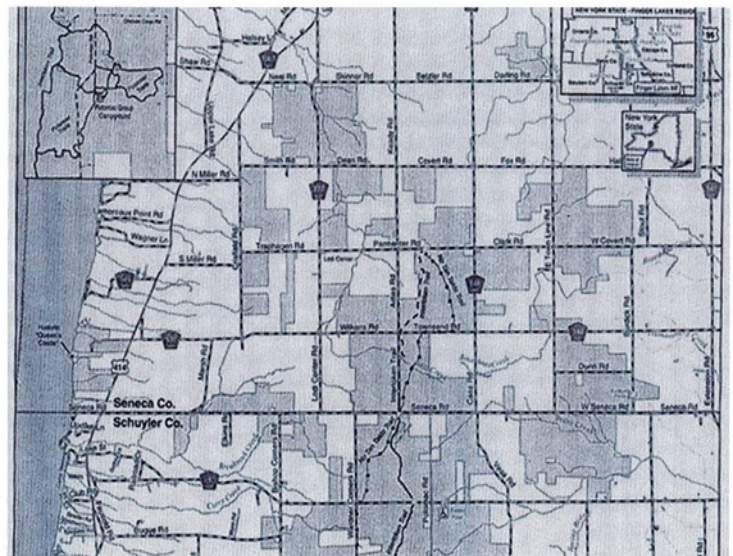
those farms had already been abandoned. Because some farmers chose to sell and some did not choose to sell, there arose a “patchwork quilt” of properties owned by the federal government. As a result, there was not one uniform area totally owned by the federal government.

### YEARS OF DUST



RESETTLEMENT ADMINISTRATION  
Rescues Victims  
Restores Land to Proper Use

### The “patchwork quilt” of farms acquired



By 1941, the lands purchased by the Resettlement Administration were formally organized as the Hector Land Use Area, managed by the U.S. Government's Soil Conservation Service of the Department of Agriculture. Large numbers of conifer trees were planted to help stabilize the eroding hillsides. Most of the previously tilled farmland was converted to pastures. By 1946 these pasture lands were ready to be used as grazing pastures.

Large numbers of conifer trees were planted to help stabilize the eroding hillsides. Most of the previously tilled farmland was converted to pastures. By 1946 these pasture lands were ready to be used as grazing pastures.

In 1946 there was the formal organization of the Hector Cooperative Grazing Association to lease the pasture lands to nearby farmers. Until 1971 this Hector Cooperative Grazing Association could lease portions of the 35 fenced-in pastures on the 4,500 acres to farmers so that their sheep or beef or dairy cattle could graze there between May 1<sup>st</sup> and November 1<sup>st</sup>. Initially there were over 130 dues-paying members. Currently there are 35 dues-paying members of the Hector Cooperative Grazing Association.

(continued on page 8)

## FINGER LAKES NATIONAL FOREST

BY SENECA COUNTY HISTORIAN WALTER GABLE  
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7)

The lands were a major leased grazing area success. Soil erosion concerns had been largely alleviated. But in the early 1950s opinion was advocating for more extensive use of public land by the public. In 1954, the administrative responsibilities of these Hector lands were transferred from the Soil Conservation Service to the U.S. Forest Service. As a part of the U.S. Forest Service, there was a new emphasis upon wildlife conservation and public recreation and education.

By the early 1970s the future of these Hector lands as part of the U.S. Forest Service were in question. The Cayuga Indian Nation was claiming that their lands had been unjustly taken by agreements forced upon them by the State of New York. Efforts were being made to reach an out-of-court settlement with the Cayuga Nation. The Cayuga Nation insisted upon getting back lands as part of any such out-of-court settlement. One area considered as a possibility was the 3,629 acres of these Hector lands in Seneca County (comprising 27% of Seneca County lands). That never materialized.



Then, in 1982, the Hector area was identified by the federal government as a possible land area to be declared as "excess" by the Forest Service and sold off without the approval of Congress. Local residents were vehement in their opposition to any sale of these Hector Land Use Area lands. Over 8,200 signatures were obtained on petitions to oppose any public sale. Shown at right is an article that appeared in the *New York Times* on February 20, 1983. Our area representatives in the U.S. Congress introduced legislation that would, in effect, prevent the U.S. Forest Service from selling these Hector lands without approval from Congress.

Furthermore, to prevent the sale of these Hector lands, on November 28, 1983, Congress gave Na-

tional Forest status to the former Hector Land Use Area. In 1985, this area became known as the Hector Ranger District, Finger Lakes National Forest. This is the only national forest in New York State. Originally, this Finger Lakes National Forest was about 13,000 acres, but today it has expanded to be a total of over 16,1000 acres. Because of its small size, administratively, the Finger Lakes National Forest is a unit of the Green Mountain National Forest.

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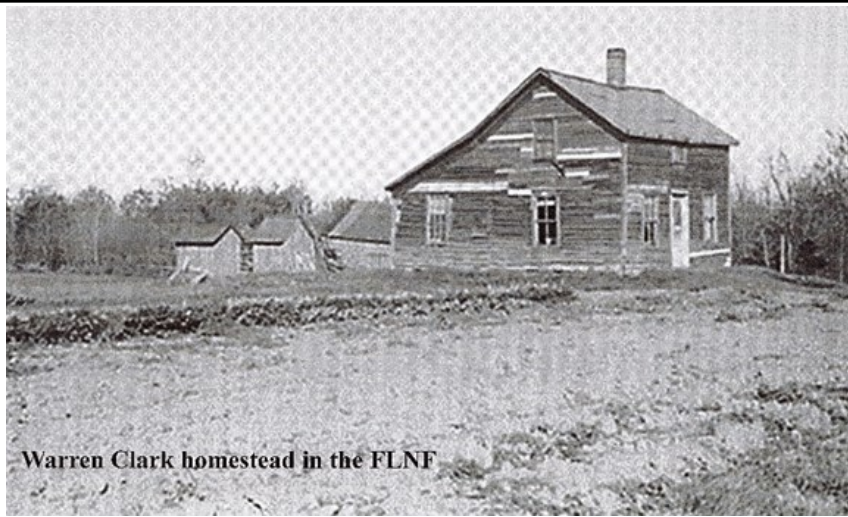


### Establishment of the Finger Lakes National Forest

- Nov. 29, 1983 - Congress gave National Forest status given to the former Hector Land Use Project lands
- October 1985 name - Hector Ranger District, Finger Lakes National Forest
- An administrative unit of the Green Mountain National Forest
- Initially about 13,000 acres
- Today 16,212 acres



**FINGER LAKES NATIONAL FOREST**  
BY SENECA COUNTY HISTORIAN WALTER GABLE  
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8)

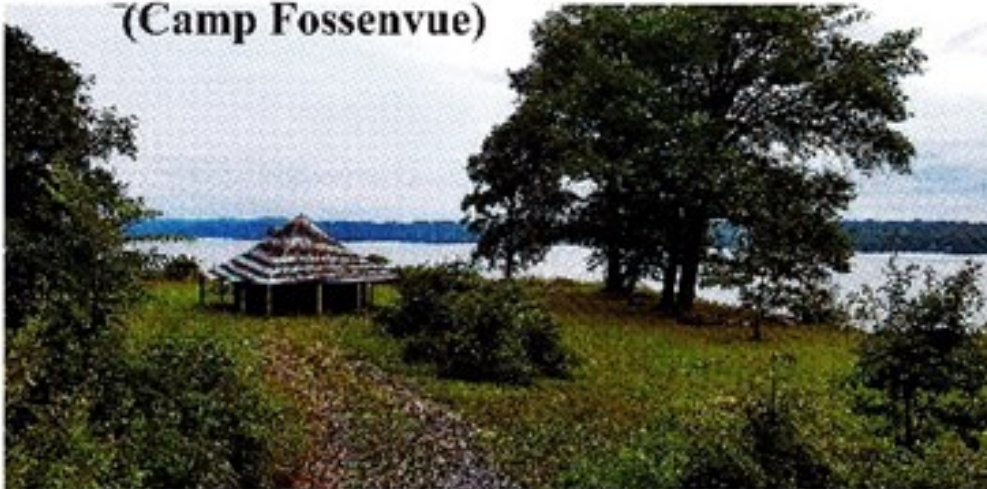


Warren Clark homestead in the FLNF

As has been indicated earlier in this article, some farmers simply abandoned their farms in the 1930s and other farms were sold to the federal government. Shown is the house and some small barns of the Warren Clark farm that became property of the Finger Lakes National Forest. This picture gives an idea of how the farmers of these lands were typically having only a marginal experience.

The Finger Lakes National Forest owns a few acres near Caywood Point on Seneca Lake. This area between c. 1875 and 1908 was known as Fossenvue or Camp Fossenvue. It was a summertime cultural and recreational camp established by Elizabeth Smith Miller and 6 others from Geneva, NY. Many prominent people visiting the camp—including Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. The only remaining building of this summer camp is called Queen's Castle. This building was placed on the National Register in 1999.

**Fossenvue  
(Camp Fossenvue)**



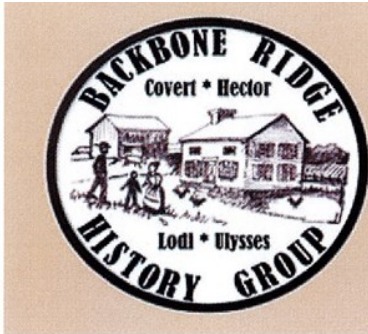
Queen's Castle

- c. 1875-1908
- A cultural and recreational summer camp/retreat near Caywood Point on Seneca Lake
- Organized by Elizabeth Smith Miller & other prominent Geneva residents
- Many prominent people visited the camp including Elizabeth Cady Stanton & Susan B. Anthony
- Queen's Castle is the sole surviving building & was listed on the National Register in 1999
- Property is part of the Finger Lakes National Forest

(continued on page 10)

**FINGER LAKES NATIONAL FOREST**  
**BY SENECA COUNTY HISTORIAN WALTER GABLE**  
**(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9)**

In 2006, residents of the area organized as the Backbone Ridge History Group to help uncover and preserve the history of this Backbone Ridge area.



### The Backbone Ridge History Group of Schuyler and Seneca Counties

- **Formed in 2006**
- **Group Mission:** To identify and facilitate public access to sources of information documenting the history of the people, communities, and lands in and around the Finger Lakes National Forest and promote the study of this history.
- **Group Vision:** An organization that honors and preserves the history of the land and the people in and around the Finger Lakes National Forest, bringing this history to life for current and future generations through its educational programs and collection of artifacts and archives.

“The Finger Lakes National Forest is community built. The Hector Land Use area was managed by the Forest Service since the 50s as a ‘land use area.’ It wasn’t until the 80s when the land was considered for resale that the community—folks who’ve grazed, hunted, and hiked the area for decades—made it clear they wanted the land to remain public for multiple-use. It is thanks to them that the area was declared the ‘Finger Lakes National Forest’ in 1985. Forest partners, neighbors, and friends have been helping to manage the land long before it was a National Forest and we look forward to working with them for years to come.”



Jody Vanselow,  
District Ranger  
Forest Service  
Green Mountain & Finger Lakes National Forests,  
Hector Ranger District





THE TOWN OF LODI

**Invites you**

To the dedication ceremony for the

*Silas Halsey NYS Historical Marker*

*Funded by the William G. Pomeroy Foundation*

Saturday, June 3rd, 2023 at 3pm

At the former home of Silas Halsey  
now owned by Linda Farr Lucas  
8375 North Main Street

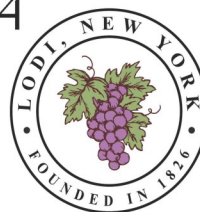
Silas Halsey served as a State of New York Representative  
to the 9th US Congress (1805 – 1807)

*Recognized for his resilience in the face of poverty and struggle  
during the American Revolution, he built a farm from the  
wilderness, he left a legacy of service and as a public servant, he  
was a pillar in his community; a leader of men.*

*Reception to follow at the Lodi Historical Society*

In case of rain, the dedication will take place at the LHS  
8493 South Main Street in Lodi, NY

RSVP (845)0399-4094  
knodish1@mac.com





## CYNTHIA G. NEALE

Sunday June 11th @ 2pm 5242 Logan Rd. Burdett

Sponsored by the Backbone Ridge History Group

*And the Nelson B. Delavan Foundation*

### Backbone Ridge History Group

PO Box 62

Trumansburg, NY 14886

President: Charlotte Dickens

Vice President: Harold Bush

Secretary: Sandra Bradford

Treasurer: Dave Smith

Trustees: Harold Bush,

Sandra Bradford, Mark Brown, Charlotte

Dickens, Bill Sebring

David Smith

Newsletter Coordinator: Beth Bevars

Editor: Kari Milliman Gauntt

Webmaster: Dan Huston



### We need you!

The Backbone Ridge History Group needs **you** to

- serve on the Board;
- help plan & run events;
- write newsletter articles;
- research and write grants; and
- plan for the future.

#### Can you help?

If so, please email [backboneridgehg@gmail.com](mailto:backboneridgehg@gmail.com)  
or call Charlotte at 910-988-2268.

Your assistance is vital to our continued work.