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# THE VAN EPPS PAPERS

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A Collection Of The Reports Of  
**P E R C Y M . V A N E P P S**

**On The History Of The Town Of Glenville**



Percy M. Van Epps 1859-1950

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# THE VAN EPPS PAPERS

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**3rd Edition**

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# Percy M. Van Epps: Our first town historian

Scotia-Glenville Journal  
January 27, 1966

BY DONALD A. KEEFER

In his series of fifteen papers published by the town board between 1926 and 1948, Percy Van Epps left his fellow citizens a priceless collection of local history and folklore. Percy passed away fifteen years ago, so many of our younger historians were never privileged to know him.

I have prepared this sketch so you may know a little of his personal life. When reading any of Percy's historical series concerning the history of Glenville and Scotia, now fast becoming collector's items and unobtainable, you will undoubtedly sense and appreciate his ability as the master story-teller. For either personal enjoyment or a research fool we highly recommend them. Complete bound sets are available in both the Scotia Public Library and History Center.

Although his family was one of the oldest in this section, Percy Myers Van Epps was born in Germantown, Columbia County, N.Y., the only child of John Perry and Rosalie (Myers) Van Eps (now spelled Van Epps). This was on August 30, 1859, and two weeks later he was brought to the Van Eps homestead in West Glenville where he spent the remainder of his long life. Percy was brought up by his grandparents, David C. and Cataline Van Eps. From his beloved grandmother Percy learned many of the tales of long by-gone days he loved to spin.

He was a man who controlled his own destiny with vigor and intelligence. Self educated, he excelled in many fields; geography, archeology, history, music, geology, and, in his spare time, agriculture.

Percy numbered among his close friends many of the leading scientists, scholars and authors of the day. His many publications of the fields of archeology, local history and folklore from a large part of the recorded history of our vicinity.



PERCY M. VAN EPPS

He had an interesting mind; quick, accurate, and filled with amazing and delightful stories. Yet for all his knowledge, this fine old Glenville scholar was a man who at all times was modest and unassuming. His humor was whimsical. It had no slap-stick air about it because it was real humor.

He was one of the area's first speleologists who treated cave exploration as a science, and caves that are being "rediscovered" today were old stories to him a half century ago.

Percy knew geology. In many cases he had the uncanny ability of looking at a rock, telling its type and the spot from where it was picked up.

He was stubborn about his history. His numerous publications and newspaper articles reflect his careful and exacting research. Percy was truly a born historian.

In 1926 Glenville appointed him the first town historian. Three years later he was given the post of county historian. He held both of these offices until his death. He first started contributing to learned periodicals in 1894. An honorary member of the New York State Archeological Association, Percy was co-founder of the Van Epps-Hartley Chapter of that organization. His huge collection of Indian artifacts collected in the Mohawk Valley is today housed at the Mohawk-Caughnawaga Museum at Fonda.

He played and taught bands in Charlton, Glenville, Pattersonville, Scotia and the 13th Brigade in Amsterdam. He declined offers with several large bands and orchestras. Once, many years ago, when he played in a well known band of this area, he appeared in

Washington with a group to play at the second inauguration of Grover Cleveland. The fellows knew his love for natural history and archeology and one of them kidded him about riding down the street in a buggy with the head of the Smithsonian Institution. "That," answered Percy, "wasn't the head of the institute. That was Grover himself, and as we drove along, Grover said to me, 'Perc, when I get through with this business and all my postmasters are appointed, I want you to meet me and give me lessons on the saxophone!'"

In his early eighties he pitched hay and walked over the countryside with a slow and measured stride and with the confidence of a man who knew it inside out. He was a familiar figure on many of the hikes of the Mohawk Valley

Hiking Club and it proved a field day for historical knowledge when he was along. In the cities of Schenectady and Amsterdam he was a familiar figure, dressed usually in an overcoat, dark hat, dark suit, and almost always carrying that old briefcase loaded to the brim with the research work of the moment.

On September 1, 1951, Percy passed away on his Glenville farm at the age of 92 years. His memory is very much alive today. We and the coming generations owe him a great debt of gratitude for adding so much to our heritage.

A word must be said of his beloved wife, Margaret, who shared with her husband a keen interest in his many and varied pursuits during their sixty odd years together.

## **FOREWORD**

This reprinting of papers depicting activities early in the history of Glenville and surrounding areas is of particular interest as we move into the next century. These papers give views of persons, properties and historical events which have had an impact on the development of our present and future direction.

The Town of Glenville is fortunate to have a dedicated and inspired Town Historian, Joan Szablewski. As you will see, her work is of the highest caliber.

It is with pride and pleasure that I serve as the Supervisor of this historic and dynamic Town and to have so much of its past documented in the following pages.

**Wayne E. Wagner**  
Town Supervisor

**TOWN BOARD  
TOWN OF GLENVILLE**

**1998**



*Front row, left to right: Clarence W. Mosher, Councilman; Nelson L. Austin, Town Clerk; Wayne E. Wagner, Supervisor; Fredric K. Lindsay, Councilman; Back row, left to right: Peter V. Russo, Councilman; David S. Bradley, Councilman; Robert A. Moore, Town Attorney.*

## Acknowledgements

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*Joan Spencer Szablewski* - Town of Glenville Historian