

THE SCHENECTADY PATENT

OF 1684 AND

THE COMMON LAND

OF GLENVILLE, N. Y.

by

PERCY M. VAN EPPS

"They Had All Things Common"
—Acts, 4:32

Foreword

Twenty years ago, in 1928, the Town of Glenville published the first of the series of reports by its town historian, Percy M. Van Epps, of which this story of the common lands is the fifteenth. I can attest to the eagerness and impatience with which each new paper has been awaited, not only by the people of Glenville, whose history and traditions they have preserved, but by historians throughout the Mohawk Valley and the State.

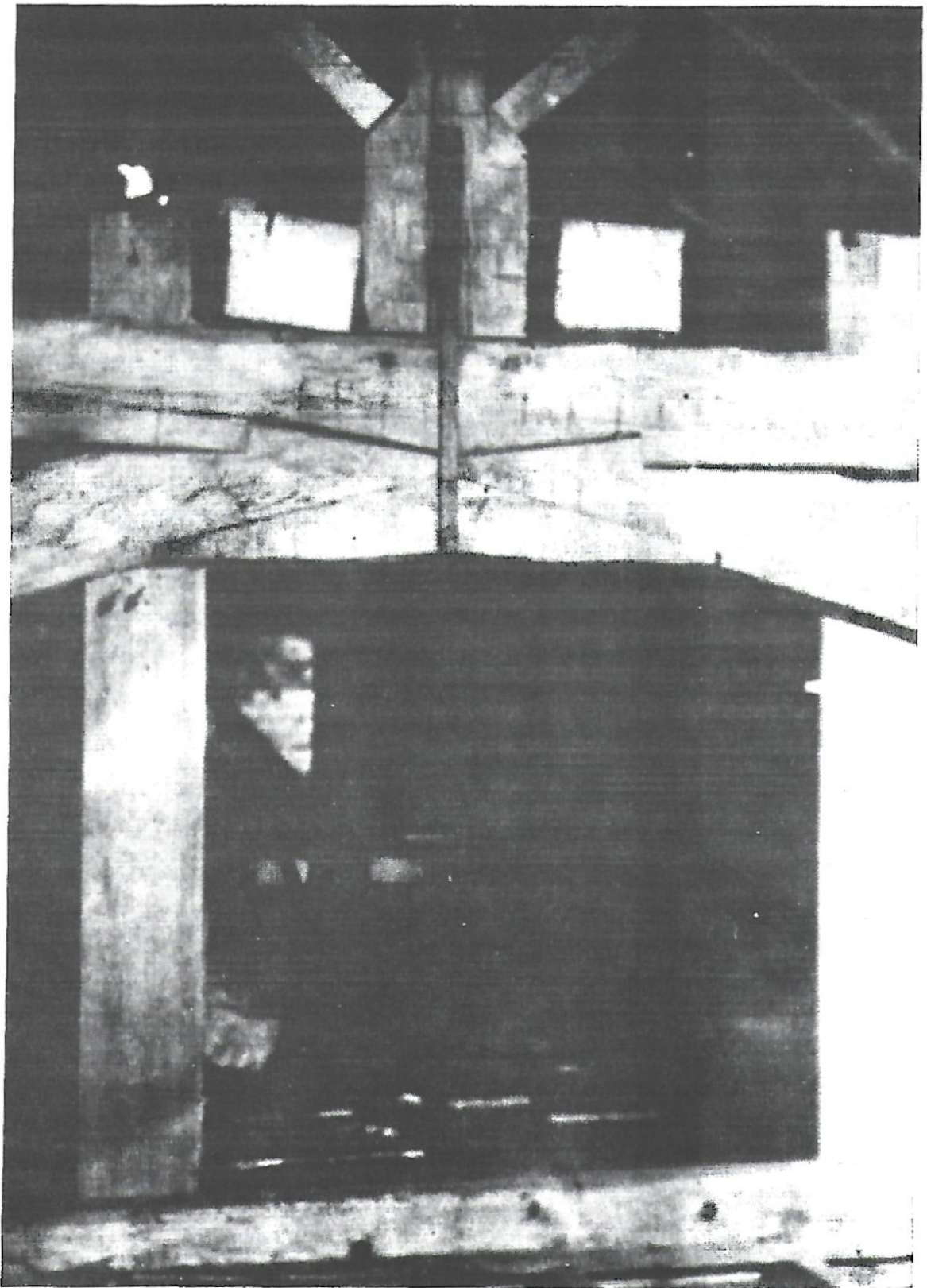
The story of the Glenville Commons is especially appropriate in this year when Glenville's neighbor and one-time parent, the City of Schenectady, is celebrating the 150th anniversary of its incorporation. But for a long controversy over the control of the common lands, first among factions of the Dutch settlers and later between the Dutch "descendants" and the "Yankee" newcomers, the chartering of Schenectady as a city might have been delayed for many years, and Glenville's own story might have been changed in many respects. As Mr. Van Epps has explained here, when Glenville at last became independent of the city and the Commons were divided, the way in which these lands were treated by the city and by the town was very different.

I know of no other town in the state which can boast of having sponsored so valuable and distinguished a series of contributions to its history as can Glenville. Individually and as a collection these papers have set an example for other localities of how much can be done when an active local historian has the co-operation of an enlightened and interested town board.

P. SCHUYLER MILLER, *President*
Mohawk Valley Historic Association

CONTENTS

- CHAPTER I THE SCHENECTADY PATENT OF 1684
 Its Extent.
 Its Common Lands.
 Abundance of Predatory Animals.
 Conde Family Establish a Home.
 Sugar Town, on Eastern Border of the Commons.
 Visit of a Panther.
- CHAPTER II ORIGIN OF THE TOWN OF GLENVILLE.
 Survey and Sale of the Common Land.
 Hardships of the Settlers.
- CHAPTER III THE SETTLERS AND THEIR NATIONALITIES.
 The Dutch, German, Scotch, Irish, Swiss, English, and
 the Ex-slaves.
- CHAPTER IV A SOURCE OF REVENUE COMES.
 Superabundance of Wood, at First a Nuisance, Becomes a
 Source of Profit.
- CHAPTER V MANY FINE VIEWPOINTS.
 The Upper Hudson; Lake George Area; Kunjimuc; May-
 fields; Canada Lake Peaks; Cherry Valley Hills; Otsego
 Region; The Yontapushaburg; Indian Ladder Region;
 The Catskills; Saratoga Lake; Rocky Tucks; Bemis
 Heights; Mount Willard; Berkshires; and Green Moun-
 tains.
- CHAPTER VI INDIAN OCCUPATION.
 Essentially Algonkian; Never Used by Mohawks, Except
 for Passage of War Parties and for Trade.
- CHAPTER VII GEOLOGY; MAMMY GARRETT BOULDER.
 Discovery of Unique Concretions.
 Scarcity of Fossil Life Forms; the Great Erratic of a
 Northosite Far from Its Parent Ledge; the Garrett
 Family; Their Lonely Home.



(Photo by Edwin G. Conde)

Massive Truss-work Supporting Roof of Dutch Reformed Church in Glenville, Built 1812-1813. (Simon J. Van Patten, Builder)

THE COMMONS OF GLENVILLE

By

PERCY M. VAN EPPS

Chapter 1. THE SCHENECTADY PATENT ISSUED IN 1684. ITS EXTENT AND ITS COMMON LANDS

The Original Patent for Schenectady issued by Governor Dongan in 1684 embraced not only much of the present area of the City of Schenectady but also the present Town of Rotterdam, all south of the Mohawk River and a tract about similar extent north of the River, the present Town of Glenville. This northern part of the Patent is about fourteen miles from east to west and with an average breadth of about four miles, its southern boundary for its whole extent being the Mohawk River. Paralleling and adjoining the River is a strip of varying width of fertile flatlands under constant cultivation since its settlement early in the eighteenth century. The extreme eastern and northern parts of the area of the Patent stand at a somewhat higher level than the flat land along the River rising gradually from the Alplaus, its eastern boundaries, to the present Village of Glenville where it attains an elevation of more than seven hundred feet above sea level. Parallel with the River and extending about four miles east to west and an average of two miles from north to south is an elevated ridge rising to a height of nearly eleven hundred feet above sea level. This wild and rugged hill region densely wooded, was together with a somewhat similar tract south of the River in the present Town of Rotterdam, designated as the Common Land of the Patent of Schenectady. These areas as their name would indicate were Common and Free Lands to the inhabitants of the Patent, who had the right to procure therefrom all necessary firewood, also timber for their buildings and the privilege of pasturage if they cared to risk their stock in these wild and unfenced tracts infested with wolves and occasionally larger predatory animals. Quoting from a paper by Charles P. Sanders, "each turning out his cattle, sheep and hogs in the Spring and letting them run until Winter, when all would be driven in and each owner select his own according to the cut or slit in the ear as registered." (The records in Glenville contain a description of the marks of the stock of a number of people.) What a fine occasion this annual round-up must have been for the boys and young men of the region, chasing back and forth through the four-mile forested length of the Commons after various groups of cattle and hogs, driving them to some appointed spot to be driven home by their owners. Sanders spoke of sheep but it is very doubtful if sheep were ever turned loose in the Common Land for sheep have an inherent fear of entering and grazing in a heavy forested area where wolves and other of

their enemies resort. Aside from the wolves that infested the Common Lands even as late as the 1820's, there are recorded stories of panthers occasionally seen therein. One such instance was often told and re-told by Johannes (Honnie) Conde, a son of Adam Conde, one of the very early settlers of the upper part of the Sacandaga Road then but recently opened for the passing of wagons. Adam Conde was born in Schenectady in 1748, the second son of the Adam Conde who was killed in the Battle of Beukendaal. Adam served through the entire course of the Revolution in the Albany County Militia. Very soon after the close of the War he secured title of a small tract of land along the Sacandaga Road some eight miles north of Schenectady at a place where that road was crossed by a small stream, now known as the Conde creek. Here, Adam with such help as his boys could give him, made each spring considerable quantities of maple sugar. He named the area of his purchase "SUGAR TOWN." This name can be found on certain old land maps of the area. Here, in a pleasant and sheltered situation on the north side of the stream and not far from the highway, Adam established his home where he and his wife, Catalina Truax, spent their remaining days and here occurred the visit of a panther mentioned above. The story, as told by "Honnie," Adam's eldest son, was essentially as follows: One evening, probably in the year 1784, Catalina sat reading her Bible by the light of her tallow candle, her husband being asleep in the recess at the back of the room. The three boys, John, Peter and Cornelius, were in their beds in the attic. As she was reading, she was alarmed by a wild scream outside their door. Quickly crossing the room she aroused her husband, "Indians, Adam"; at this Adam arose, grasped his gun, which he always kept at the head of his bed. At this minute another wild scream was heard, "Not Indians, it's a panther!" exclaimed Adam. Crossing to the outer door he silently unbarred the upper half of the door. Opening it a bit, peering out in the gloom, he could make out the form of a dark animal pacing around his log pig-pen wherein his pigs were confined each night for safety. Pushing the muzzle of his gun through the upper half of the Dutch-door, Adam, aiming as best he could, fired, and was certain that he hit the animal from the startled leap and scream, but evidently not a mortal wound. The family learned that on the morning following their evening alarm a panther was shot and killed while prowling around the buildings of the very few settlers; this was thought to be the same one that alarmed the Condes. It will be seen that the alarm of Indians expressed by Catalina was not groundless, for only a few weeks before a small band of Saint Regis Indians had approached an isolated home a little over two miles north of the Conde's home, where they killed and scalped its owner Joseph Gonzalus, shot and killed his oldest son Emanuel and carried captive to Canada his second son John.

The heavy primitive forest that covered both the north and south areas of the

Schenectady Patent contained great and small groups of both pine and hemlock as well as beach, birch, maple, and also many white oaks whose trunks, squared, were freely used for the framework of barns and out-buildings by the farmers whose land adjoined the area of the "Commons" as those regions were occasionally called. In the few barns yet standing, fine examples of this oaken framework can be seen. In the year 1812 when the plans were completed for the building of a Dutch Reformed Church at the upper corners, or the "Hookies" as it was sometimes called, now the Village of Glenville, many of these white oaks were felled by volunteer labor and dragged by oxen to the site selected for the new Church. Here they were hewn and squared by Simon J. Van Patten and his men, the contractor and builder of the Church. The framework of this Church can be seen in the massive trusses that support the ceiling and the roof. Incidentally, hot dinners were daily carried to Van Patten and his men by his two oldest daughters (Eleanor and Sarah) who walked over two miles distance. (Eleanor became the wife of William Ward, and Sarah became the wife of Willis Calkins.)

Chapter II. THE ORIGIN OF THE TOWN OF GLENVILLE

In April of the year 1820 the fourth ward of the City of Schenectady, which name that part of the Patent lying north of the River had borne since the Incorporation of the City in 1798, became a Town which was given the name of GLENVILLE in Commemoration of Glen Esk in Forforshire, Scotland. This glen was the birthplace of Alexander Lindsay, who came to the present site of Scotia, selecting this for his future home, building his house thereon in 1658, said to be the first dwelling built by a white man north of the Mohawk River. Soon thereafter Lindsay secured the scrawling mark of certain Mohawk Chiefs, a mere gesture but one then thought necessary before the Colonial Authorities would confirm and grant a deed in this area. The Rev. William Beauchamp, our best authority on these Five Confederate Nations, says in his *History of the Iroquois*, page 160, "The national boundary east was the top of the hills east of Schoharie Creek." Beauchamp also maps the dividing line between the territory claimed by the Mohawks and the Algonquin eastward about midway between Schenectady and Amsterdam. Thus Glen secured Legal Title to his holding, to which he then personally gave the name Scotia in Honor of his native country. Shortly following the creation of the new Town came demand and pressure that the system of free firewood, timber and pasturage of the Commons that had been granted for over half a century be abolished. These demands probably came from the fact that for a long time previous there had been much stealing of timber and firewood from the area in question by persons living outside. Soon

thereafter the Authorities of the new Town brought about a survey of the Commons which has been best described by the late Charles P. Sanders, whose fine description, published by our County Historical Society in their Year Book for 1905-1906, we will here quote: "Lines were run north and south through Glenville at such distances apart as to divide the Common Lands in parcels, each alternate strip being retained by Glenville, the other going to Schenectady, and practically the same was done in Rotterdam."

Schenectady, still holding to the Dutch size of farms, although influenced perhaps some by later arrivals of the English, divided its lands into 50-acre farms, which were leased to newcomers as desired.

Glenville holding to the claim that the land belonged to all the inhabitants, and desirous of being just, divided her lands into as many farms or lots as there were voters, thereby making each parcel about 20 acres, with a few rough corners of 30 acres and a very few smaller. An annual Quit-rent (so called) was fixed for each piece of from 10 cents to 20 cents per acre according to quality. The several parcels were then divided among the voters, not by lot, but by auction, each voter having the right to only one lot when he could bid no more. The bidding was thus only for the choice. Those who already had farms, of course, bought adjoining land, and in many instances paid their employees to bid in other desirable pieces and afterwards transfer same to their employers. Many pieces fell into the hands of those who had no use for them, and in a short time were sold to others, frequently to persons in the city, who kept the lots for wood lots and paid the annual Quit. Thus nearly all the land in Glenville, Rotterdam and the City came under Quit-rent. Shortly after this survey was completed as related, an auction was held in which many of the 20-acre lots were sold to the voters of the Town in the manner as described. Settlement of the Commons seemingly did not progress as rapidly as was expected for many of these lots were bought to remain as wood lots only, not to be cleared for cultivation. Some of these last mentioned lots remain thus to this very day. On the alternate North-South strips allotted to the City of Schenectady, there seemed to have been no restriction as to whom they were sold, consequently prospective settlers, non-voters, and others outside the Town, selected the lots they desired from those held by Schenectady. These settlers met with many discouragements; the three or four roads crossing the area from north to south were almost impassable, yet ungraded and undrained, well sprinkled with large stumps from the primitive forest and with occasional glacial boulders, some of the latter too large to be dragged to one side by teams of oxen. These had to be moved by some other method. Sometimes if the soil they rested on was deep enough, a hole was dug close beside the offending rock, into which, when it was of a proper depth, the boulder was tipped and thus disposed of. Other methods for the riddance of

large boulders was practiced in those days. By heating the unwanted boulder by the building of long continued fires, the unequal expansion of its mass thus caused would generally crack the boulder in several pieces. The last, a more expensive way and one but rarely used, was the slow and tiresome drilling a hole in the rock with hammer and hand-drill, the hole charged with fuse and blasting powder which when fired shattered the boulder into fragments. Glacial boulders large and small were infrequent on the area of the Commons; strangely, for on the lowlands both to the north and to the east they are found by the hundreds. One exception however to this scarcity mentioned "The Great Mammy Garrett Boulder"; thus locally called, is the largest glacial erratic thus far known in the entire lower Mohawk Region. This unique boulder will be described later in this paper.

The settler of the Commons was at once faced with the necessity of finding a shelter for himself and family; perhaps only a temporary one. He might build one of logs which then could be readily procured from his own purchase but there exists no record or remembrance of any log houses having been built anywhere on the area of the Commons. The day of log houses had passed; the settlers, one and all, built frame houses. Rough lumber for framing was of course to be had on every hand, but sawn lumber for finishing the houses could at that period only be had from the sawmills in Schenectady or from points equidistant northward, for the sawmills of twenty or thirty years before had operated on the streams flowing from the Commons which then were unused or had fallen into ruins. The six or more sawmills on the small streams flowing from the hill-side of the Commons, busy mills some fifty years before, might have well been classed as wet weather mills for they could only run following long rainy periods or the melting winter snows. Practically all of the streams of the Commons run dry in the summertime. Once shelter, temporary or otherwise, was provided for himself and family, the settler would turn his attention to the clearing of the forest growth from his purchase, a long and laborious task described in every published story of the settlement of the Mohawk region, which therefore will not be told here.

Chapter III. THE SETTLERS: THEIR NATIONALITIES

Among those who came to make the Commons their new home were families of different racial groups. Predominant among these were families of Dutch descent, practically all of those descended from very early Dutch settlers in America. Prominent among these were four Hallenbeck brothers; William James; George; Jacob and Matthew. These, lineal descendants of Casper Jacobse Hallenbeck who came to Albany in 1650, came with their families to the Commons from their former homes in the Town of Berne, Albany County.



(Photo by Clarence M. Van Der Veer, from original painting)

Train on the Utica-Schenectady Railroad Approaching Hoffmans Ferry One-half Mile Eastward. Hoffmans Was the Principal Point for Supplying Wood for the Locomotives. From a Painting Made by Amos Covey Van Eps About 1838-40. In the Background of the Picture Is the Tavern Kept by John and Jane Van Eps 1796-1840. The Birthplace of Amos Covey Van Eps, Born 1814.

Three Winne brothers: Peter; Henry and John with their families, also came from the Town of Berne. Others were the Vedders; the Van Nattens; the Mabies; the Van Pattens; the Alsdorfs; the Swarts; the Dorns and the Schermerhorns.

Among the German settlers were the Hansaws; the Brannmills; the Myers; the Kings; the Christophers; and the Pagles.

Among the Scotch we may list the McLachlans; the Gardners; the Fergusons; and the Fyvies; although the head of that family, when questioned seemed to claim a double ancestral home, for said he: "I was born in Ayrshire, right near where the Battle of Waterloo was fought." From Ireland came the Collins and the Glass families; from Switzerland, came but one family, that of Henry Shankle, a native of Rapperschwell on Lake Luzerne; among the English were the Gowers; the Reynolds; the Sharps; and the Weatherwax families.

There were also two families of ex-slaves, the Murrays and the Wilsons.

Chapter IV. A SOURCE OF REVENUE COMES

The early settler of the Commons, despite his hardships and privations, had however firewood in superabundance so essential for his comfort. Indeed, in the clearing of his fields for tillage this abundance of wood was a nuisance that had to be gotten rid of. This riddance was generally accomplished by dragging the felled trees into large piles which when dry enough were burned. But, a few years later when the Utica and Schenectady Railroad was completed and in operation, these came in demand for wood for their locomotives. The demand, however, was small at first but as more and more trains were put in operation demands constantly increased, and still later when other railroads from Utica to Buffalo and all these railways were combined into the great New York Central system the demand was again increased four-fold. Not long after this merger, coal came into use as a fuel. During the period of nearly thirty years' demand, many hundreds of cords were cut on the Commons, and drawn to the woodyard of the railroad at Hoffmans, where it was sawn by power in suitable lengths for use in the locomotives. The writer well remembers a ride he had, through the kindness of its engineer, on one of these wood-burning locomotives.

Chapter V. MANY FINE VIEWPOINTS

The unique situation of the elevation of the Commons, isolated from other hills and peaks affords fine views in every direction. Looking north one sees a short stretch of the Upper Hudson between Corinth and Luzerne; beyond are the mountains in the Lake George region. A little to the westward is a maze of

small Peaks, the Kunjimuc region, the great hunting grounds of the Mohawks. Looking west are the Mayfield Mountains, and the mountains around Canada Lake. Farther south are the hills of Cherry Valley and the Otsego Country. Directly south and seemingly very near is the Yon-ta-push-a-burg ("John ear of corn hill"), the highest elevation of the Commons of Rotterdam. Beyond the eastern flank of the peak one can see the cliffs of the Indian Ladder Region of the Helderbergs, and farther beyond the northern peaks of the Catskills. Looking eastward however the observer gets perhaps the best range of views to be had from the Commons. In the foreground a broad expanse of field and forest and the gem-like blue of Saratoga Lake, beyond which he sees Rocky Tucks and Bemis Heights, the scene of the Battle of Saratoga, beyond and two miles the other side of the Hudson is the rounded dome of Willards Mountain, the highest of the Washington County hills. From the summit of this mountain there was at the time of the Revolution, watching for the approach of General Burgoyne's Army from the north, a line of pickets stretching to and across the Hudson to the headquarters of the American Army. A few miles to the east, reaching from the last of the Berkshires and fading in the distance to the north stretched the serrated range of the Green Mountains. All together the extensive and comprehensive series of views seen from the Commons cannot be excelled in this part of the State. Indeed, from a central viewpoint a lone peak in the northwest corner of Connecticut can be seen on clear days. The late Dr. Young of Glenville on his return from an inspection of a thirty-acre farm on the Commons recently bequeathed to him—an unwanted acquisition—said dryly, "Twenty-five Dollars of Land and a Hundred Dollars Worth of View."

Chapter VI. INDIAN OCCUPATION

That the whole area of the Glenville Commons was a favorite hunting ground of the Red Man is well shown by the great number of flint arrowheads found on nearly every cleared field; the conclusion naturally follows that the area was thus used for a long period, perhaps for centuries. These relics of the chase are, with rarely an exception, of Algonquin workmanship. Those versed in the archaeology of the region can readily distinguish and classify the artifacts of different races; they tell us that rarely an arrowhead or other flint object here found was made by the Mohawks. The Mohawk Nation during their comparatively short occupation of barely two centuries, well knew and traveled the forest paths of our Schenectady area in going back and forth from their villages all of which were some thirty or more miles westward, on their occasional raids on the Algonquin of New England and in carrying their furs to traders at Fort Orange. There is little evidence however that they hunted in our area for they had choice hunting grounds of their own near their homes.

No village sites nor evidence of cornfields nor pits for the storage of corn have been found on our Commons; they had soil far richer and more easily worked on the flatlands of the River where many of their village sites have been located and explored by our local Chapter of the State Archaeological Association. These researches clearly point to an occupation reaching back for centuries into the dim past. For some unknown reason, however, the Algonquin had entirely deserted all the immediate territory lying both west and north of Albany and Schenectady a century perhaps before the coming of the Dutch, who found on their arrival the land westward of the Hudson and northward covered with a heavy forest unbroken save for the Indian paths that threaded its maze. East of the Hudson there still were however Algonquin villages.

Chapter VII. GEOLOGY

Of the geological story of the Commons, interesting as it is, little will be said. For a complete record of the many changes the region has undergone during the past geologic periods; its origin under the surface of an arm of the Atlantic; its emergence and subsequent rise far above its present height; afterward, losing some three hundred feet of its topmost layers, ground to atoms, swept away by the irresistible southward movement of the Labradorian glacier, that great blanket of ice that covered practically the whole of our State, would fill the pages of a large volume.



(Photo by Clarence M. Van Der Veer)

Mammy Garrett Boulder, the Largest Erratic in the Lower Mohawk Valley. A Boulder of Granite, "Variety of Northosite," Its Parent Ledge is in the Heart of the Adirondacks.

Two items however, each of a special interest, should here receive mention: First, the discovery some fifty odd years ago on a limited area of the Commons, in a barren field, of a group of concretions of an unusual form, never before described. Being lenticular in form, they resembled two convex lenses placed together back to back. These were found by the Veteran Geologist Dr. James Hall of the State Survey and thought to be a hitherto unknown species of fossil coral. Later when sections were cut from them and put under the microscope they disclosed no trace of organic life but were simply concretions of a form never before known. They were from one-half to two inches in diameter and were as regular in form as though cast in a mould; a puzzle to the geologist. The shales of the entire area of the Commons, in which these peculiar concretions were found, is of the ordovician period; a very early period in earth's geologic story. Fossil life forms in the shales of the Commons, so far as they are exposed, are extremely rare, the finding of only a few of that most ancient life form, the Cephalopods.

Another notable feature of the Commons is the large granite erratic, locally known as the "MAMMY GARRETT BOULDER," a large weathered block of granite of the variety known as a northosite as determined by the United States Geological Survey from a sample cut from its side. Geologists tell us that the nearest known out-crop of this particular variety of granite is at Whiteface Mountain in the Adirondacks. This great erratic, the largest known glacial boulder in the lower Mohawk Valley, is a memorial left on our Commons by the Labradorean Glacier untold centuries ago, doubtless during the waning stages of that great and thick blanket of ice. The boulder lies at a point about one mile eastward from Wolf Hollow, the western border of the Commons and about the same distance northward from the Mohawk River. Close beside the boulder is the south fork of a stream—here a mere rivulet—which joins the Mohawk at the Village of Hoffmans. This stream a century and half ago was called "the Van Eps Creek" evidently from the fact that, the hamlet then being called Vedders Ferry, it ran through the property of Jan Baptist Van Eps who built and operated a sawmill thereon. This stream, draining quite a large area of the Commons, like nearly all of the tributaries of the Mohawk, no doubt had an Indian name but one long ago forgotten. The late Prof. Charles S. Prosser of Union College in his "Notes on the Stratigraphy of the Mohawk Valley," N. Y. State Bulletin, in speaking of this stream calls it "The Van Eps Creek." About the middle of the last century, James Garrett, born in England, secured title to a tract of twenty or thirty acres in a wild and somewhat desolate part of the Commons, the very area where lay the great boulder. Here, he came with his wife, who was one of the local Reynolds family, building a neat and

comfortable little house which stood but a stone's throw from the great boulder. Here in this lonely spot with forest on every side, truly a home in the wilderness, they perhaps lived in comfort for several years, but trouble came to them: their only child died young; then, being absent from home for a day, they returned to find their house in ashes. A rude cabin with but one room was then built, but a few months thereafter Mr. Garrett fell sick and died. His wife was a pathetic figure soon becoming known as "MAMMY GARRETT." The Dutch Church in Glenville and neighbors supported her for a time; she then went to live with relatives till her death at 80 years of age. James Garrett, aged 80 years, and his wife Henrietta lie side by side in the Glenville Cemetery.