

Meet the new  
Amenia Town  
Historian  
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# Amenia Historical Society

...where what was old  
is new again

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AmeniaHistorical@aol.com

## In This Issue...

- Gail Borden and the milk factory
- Borden's family in Walkill

## Digging in the Archives



Chart of available Palmer Novelties made in Wassaic some years ago by the Palmer Novelty Company Some "snappers" (center cylinders) were assembled in what had been the Wassaic House Hotel, called "The Novelty Shop", and some were farmed out to Wassaic women and children as piece work. Ruth Miller, who today lives in the former Gridley house, is the daughter of Arthur Palmer who founded the company in Dover Plains. She and Howard Miller purchased the Gridley homestead after they were married.

## Gail Borden - a Wassaic Legend

By John Quinn

*John Quinn, Leedsville resident, has been the premier publicist, researcher and writer for the Amenia Historical Society as well as the Indian Rock Schoolhouse Association for a number of years. A World War II veteran and former newspaper man in New York City, John came to Amenia to marry Margaret Duffy Erskine and has been asking questions, serving on boards and volunteering in our community ever since.*

On May 21, 2006 about 40 people attended a rededication service at United Presbyterian Church's Gridley Chapel in

**Programs Coming Up...**

**August 6: Farmers' Day at Indian Rock.** Antique farm tools demonstrated, farm wives' activities and children's old time games. Bring a picnic lunch and water to drink. Noon to 2 pm free.

**Sept. 10 : Smithfield Church & Cemetery at 2 pm**

### **Programs in the Works:**

**2008** The 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the South Amenia Presbyterian Church and the Union Society

*Big doings are planned for next year. Help us celebrate with one of our town's most interesting hamlets. A former stagestop, home of the noted Winchester and Chaffee families and site of the whatchamacall it mill, the "nook" at South Amenia was a meeting place of Mohican native Americans*

*Ideas, suggestions and volunteers: write to Bill Burke  
[janandbill59@yahoo.com](mailto:janandbill59@yahoo.com)*

### **Available Publications:**

Early History of Amenia by Newton Reed

Amenia Cookbook

Lake Amenia Booklet Reprint

Finding Aid for Amenia's Historical & Cultural Resources

*Also a selection of postcards*

**Write to Treasurer Catherine Murphy: [murphycm@mohawk.net](mailto:murphycm@mohawk.net)  
for prices and information**

### **Next Amenia Historical Society Program September 10th, 2 pm at Smithfield Church**

Smithfield is one of the oldest hamlets in the Town of Amenia. Located to the west of the village on Route 83, off Route 44. Smithfield Valley is one Amenia's most beautiful rural landscapes, characterized by horse farms and large homes. For many years the small settlement at the end of the valley was jokingly called "The City", boasting a grist mill, blacksmith shop, school and post office.

The beautiful neo-classical Smithfield Church is actually the third church on the site. Join the historical society for a tour of the elegant interior, the simple white columned exterior and the noted cemetery nearby. Visit the site of the famous Whitefield oak and the gravestone of former town historian, Catherine Flint Leigh. Learn about many of Amenia's earliest settlers who lived in Smithfield.

Wassaic. Due to a grant from the Berkshire Taconic Foundation, some much needed renovation work was completed on the inside of the building and a thank-you service was felt appropriate. At the service there was special music by Nan Herow and the Tom & Jane Allen Family. Many of those present told about their special memories relating to the chapel. A reception followed the service.

The chapel was built in 1873 by Noah Gridley whose iron-working business attracted others to the town. Mrs. Emeline Gridley, his wife, was particularly interested that there be a Sunday School for the children in Wassaic. In 1881 she deeded the chapel to the Union Society, the governing body of the South Amenia Presbyterian Church. Later in 1954 a deed of conveyance was given to the First Presbyterian Church of Wassaic with a reversion clause, that should the church fail to function as a Protestant Church the property should revert to the Union Society

Members of the congregation will be our tour guides. AHS members are encouraged to e-mail Arlene Iuliano to volunteer to bring cookies and /or punch for the refreshments.

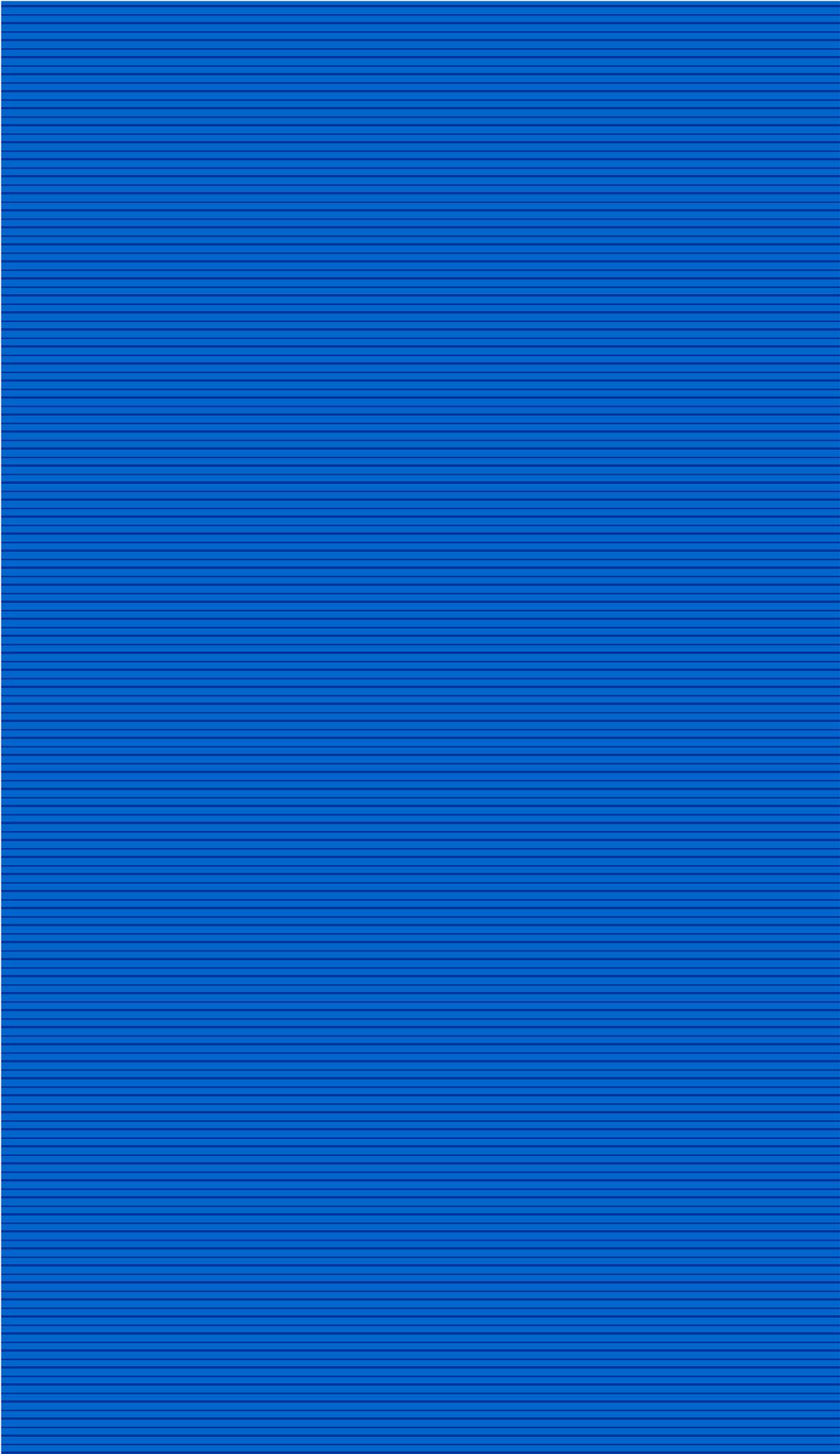
[arlenei@mohawk.net](mailto:arlenei@mohawk.net) or call: 845-373-9088

The church has functioned as a Presbyterian church, going through various unions and cooperative ventures with the churches in Amenia and South Amenia and even with the chaplaincy of the Wassaic State School. In the late 1930's and 1940's the church was serviced by a series of New York seminary students who took the train to Wassaic to lead services. From about 1965 to the time the United Presbyterian Church was formed in 1991, a three-way venture called the Webutuck Council (Wassaic, Amenia and South Amenia) financed a minister who conducted three services each Sunday - one in each church. In the 1991 a corporation known as the United Presbyterian Church of Amenia joined Gridley and the Amenia Presbyterian Church was formed. A commitment was made to continue to use Wassaic's Gridley Chapel for services.

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## **Wassaic: the Home of the Gridley Iron Works**

**By John Quinn,  
AHS trustee**



By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the iron industry in Wassaic was thriving. In 1844 Noah Gridley and his son, William had purchased the small iron works started in 1825 by an enterprising group of townspeople. This early venture was in conjunction with the Johnny Cake ore bed (now part of Silo Ridge Golf Course) in Amenia.

As with a number of other furnaces in the Oblong area of New York and Connecticut, the ingredients for successful iron making were right and handy - rich ore deposits, timbered hills for making charcoal, limestone just about everywhere and running mill streams to power the furnace bellows. The many small lakes and ponds of the Oblong today are the filled-in ore beds of years ago.

Over the 40 years of Gridley's furnace the hills of Deep Hollow were completely laid bare in the harvest of timber for charcoal.

According to James H. Smith's "History of Dutchess County", by 1843 ten furnaces in and around Amenia were producing 10,000 tons of iron and gave

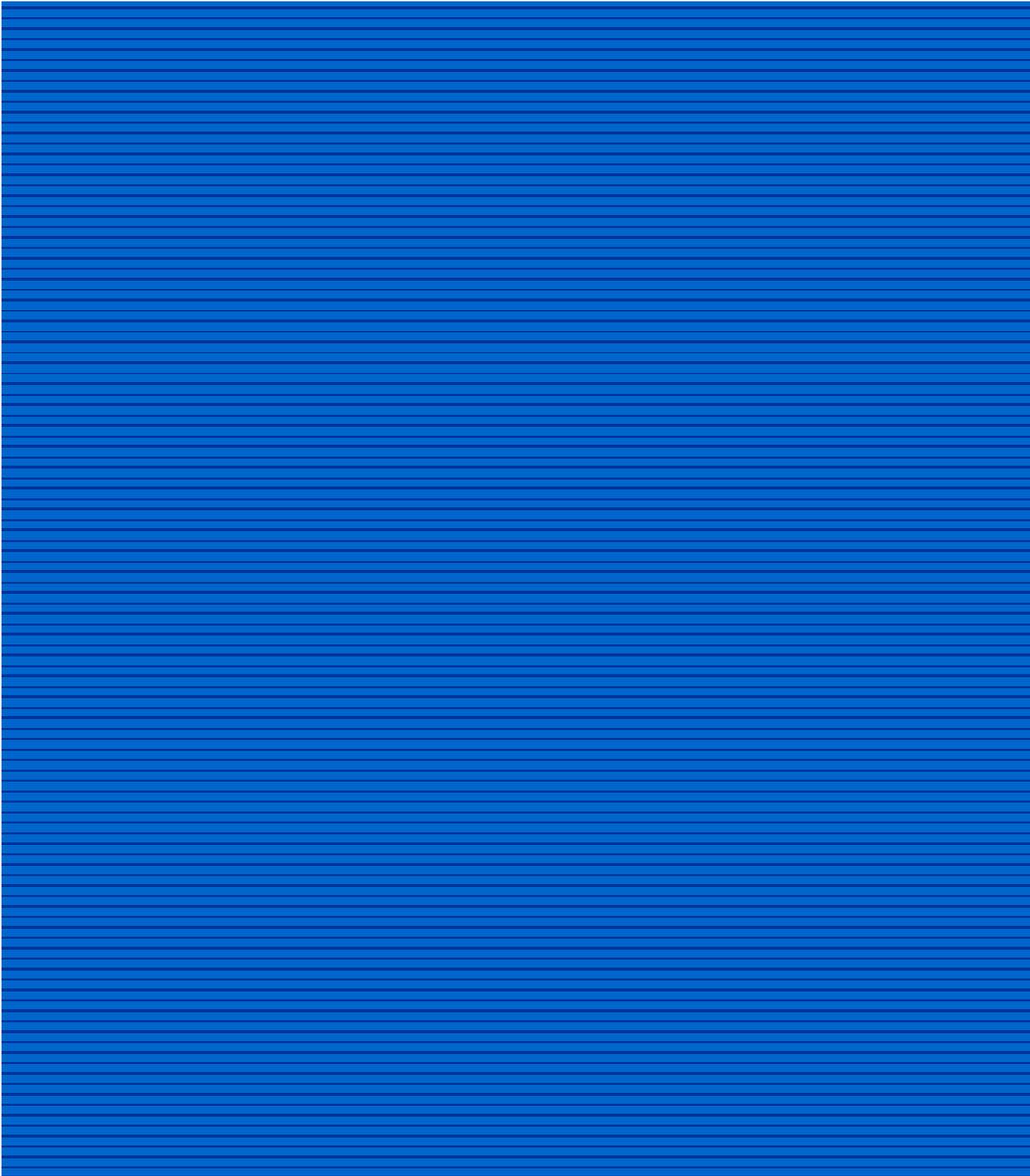
employment to some 1000 men - miners, colliers, teamsters and furnace men. The demand for this labor brought people from Europe including a large influx of Irish immigrants to work in the ore mines.

The wealth of Noah Gridley and his influence through his association with the railroad moguls Commodore Vanderbilt and Jay Gould helped make Wassaic a commercial hub that brought the New York Central Railroad north. Gridley built the old Wassaic House Hotel and backed Gail Borden in his milk condensery....Eagle Brand Condensed Milk.

The Gridley homestead built in 1820 is still standing today, the residence of Ruth Miller. Across the street is Gridley Chapel, a small architectural treasure of the past and another reminder of the legendary Gridley family.

Noah Gridley died in 1887 at the age of 85. Today, the only evidence of his iron works are the beehive shaped charcoal kilns in a clearing near the intersection of route 22 and Deep

Hollow Road



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