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EARLY CRAGSMOOR: THE STEPHEN EVANS AND JAMES WALKER FAMILIES

By Wendy E. Harris and Arnold Pickman

Ms. Harris and Mr. Pickman are listed in the Register of Professional Archaeologists and are principals of Cragsmoor Consultants

[This is the final installment in our series of four articles on early Cragsmoor history which began in the 2014 spring issue. We are deeply indebted to Ms. Harris and Mr. Pickman for their vigilant dedication to thorough research and for the generous donation of their time and effort to this endeavor. Due to lack of space, the source list will be included in the summer issue, but if you can't bear the suspense of waiting, Wendy will e-mail it to you if you contact her at wharris.cragsmoor@gmail.com.]

Stephen Evans and His Sons: From Farm to Tavern

In the middle of the nineteenth century, a small hamlet known as Evansville developed near the present day intersection of Route 52 and Cragsmoor Road. One source describes it as consisting of “a small tavern and two or three houses.” A map dating to 1854 depicts a hotel at this location. Local histories tell us that members of the Evans family operated a tavern here and that there was also a small post office, both of which served mountain residents. Evansville is also remembered as the site of one of the Newburgh-Ellenville Plank Road’s five tollhouses. Our research indicates, however, that the settlement predated the Plank Road’s construction, which was completed in 1851. An 1850 survey map filed with the Ulster County Clerk’s Office depicts what would appear to be Evansville with five structures already standing. The names “Henry Evans” and “Isaac Evans” are drawn across them. According to Legrand Botsford (1902), the settlement was the mountain’s “center of social life.” He writes that it “flourished” while the Plank Road—abandoned in 1869—“was at its best.”

Today, the only visible remnant of the hamlet is the small Evans family cemetery located south of Route 52. Invited by its present owners, Cragsmoor residents Kent Tritle and Arthur Falco, we visited the cemetery



Portion of 1854 Tilson and Brink Map of Ulster County showing the Ellenville and Newburgh Plank Road and the “H. Evens Hotel.”

in July 2014. Kent led us to its site, deep in the woods, to show us the extent of the vandalism and looting that has occurred over the decades. Nearly every gravestone has been removed or vandalized, leaving behind only footstones to mark the final resting places of several generations of Evanses. As gravestone inscriptions are a very valuable source of information for researchers, this destruction represents a significant loss. However, as we shall explain, the one surviving inscription, and various primary documents show that the Evans family’s association with this section of Cragsmoor began decades prior to the appearance of



*S. Evens Headstone in Evans Family Cemetery,
Cragsmoor, New York*

Evansville. With the aid of Evans family descendants, we were eventually able to learn a great deal about the family's history.

The first Evans known to have lived in the general vicinity of what would become Evansville was Stephen Evans. At the beginning of the nineteenth century he settled on Lot VIII of the Schoonmaker/Hornbeck tract, which includes today's Cragsmoor (see map in Cragsmoor Historical Journal – Vol. 14, Issues 1 and 2). Lot VIII was located on the southern portion of the mountain, extending southward from Bear Hill to well south of the present Route 52 and westward from the general vicinity of the intersection of Route 52 and Cragsmoor Road.

The 1799 survey of the Schoonmaker/Hornbeck tract indicates that Josiah Terwilliger then resided on Lot VIII—a tract of 543 acres. Town of Rochester tax records for the same year provide the first indication of Stephen Evans' association with the property. While he was not assessed for real property, he does appear in the records (following the entry for Josiah Terwilliger) and was assessed for personal property worth 25 dollars.

Although Stephen Evans was not listed in the 1800 census for the town of Rochester, both he and Josiah Terwilliger were assessed for a house and lot in that year. In 1801 Josiah is no longer listed in the tax records and Stephen Evans, while assessed for real property, is listed as a non-resident in the Town of Rochester.

The records noted above suggest that between 1799 and 1801, Stephen may have been in the process of moving his residence from his prior location to the mountain, dividing his time between the two locations.

The tax records indicate that by 1802 Stephen had taken up residence on Lot VIII. The 1803 tax records, which distinguish between the "possessors" (i.e. occupants) of real estate and its owners, show that in that year Stephen Evans did not yet own the land. He must have been renting the property (or possibly even "squatting") at that time.

Stephen Evans had been born in 1771 and died in 1831. He married Sarah Brannen (1774-1829) and the couple had six daughters (see below) and three sons: Henry (1801- ca. 1866), William (1804-1868) and Isaac (1812-1864). Upon her death, Sarah appears to have been buried near her home, in what is now the vandalized Evans family cemetery. During our 2014 visit, we noted that the one partially legible headstone inscription remaining seems to refer to Sarah. We interpreted it to read as follows: "S. Evens (wife??)/ of Stephen .../17...2.. (the numbers presumably represent partial dates). Stephen apparently remarried, as his wife is listed as "Anna" in his 1831 will, as well as in a deed executed in the same year. He continued to reside on Lot VIII until his death.

In his 1831 will Stephen Evans left his 116-acre "homestead" lot, located in the central portion of Lot VIII, to Isaac; 80 acres in the northeastern portion of Lot VIII to Henry; and 84 acres in the southwestern portion to William. In a separate deed executed the same day as his will, Stephen granted an additional 21 acres to three of his grandchildren, sons and daughters of his eldest daughter Mary Roosa (1796-1852). The will devised the remainder of the lot in common to all of Stephen's then-living children.

An 1832 inventory, included in probate records for Stephen's estate, provides a look at what is most likely a typical Cragsmoor farm household of that time. The inventory includes clothing, household items, and other items indicating activity on the farm. The latter include a small number of livestock: three cows, a heifer, a pair of oxen and three sheep, as well as a dog. There is also a note that Stephen's son Henry had slaughtered two hogs belonging to the estate. A plough, an ox yoke and chain and harnesses are among other items that would fall into this category. There are also tools for woodworking, for splitting

shingles (fro), and for making and/or repairing shoes. In addition, there are items used to produce clothing: a loom and a spinning wheel to process wool and equipment needed to process flax (flax crackel, hatchels and small spinning wheels). The terms used for some of this equipment are probably unfamiliar to most readers (as they were to us) and give a sense of the difference between the environment in which these early nineteenth-century Cragsmoor residents lived and that with which most of us are familiar.

In 1836 Stephen's heirs granted the western 250 acres of Lot VIII to the North American Coal Company (this includes an area on the steeply sloping west side of the mountain as well as an area southwest of Route 52), and in 1845 the other heirs transferred the remaining eastern portion of Lot VIII to Henry Evans. It was Henry who would establish and operate the hotel and tavern mentioned above. These along with other buildings became known as Evansville and are shown on maps dating to the 1850s, clustered adjacent to the Newburgh-Ellenville Plank Road (opened 1851). The post office was established in 1857 with Henry as the postmaster. He continued to serve in this capacity until his death in 1866. The Evansville post office was discontinued in 1870, shortly after the Plank Road's 1869 closing.

Stephen Evans' three sons (Henry, Isaac and William) continued to reside on Lot VIII after Stephen's death, and their households are listed in the 1850 census. By 1855, however, William had left the mountain, while Henry and Isaac continued to reside there.

Although it was Isaac who inherited Stephen Evans' homestead lot, the 1855 census records Henry as living in a log house, with Isaac residing in a frame structure. As noted in the discussion of Benjamin Coddington (see CHJ – Vol. 14, Issue 3), log houses were the type built by the early settlers. It is possible that this log structure was one built by Stephen Evans on the "homestead" lot, and that the brothers switched residences in the mid-nineteenth century period.

It is notable that Isaac Evans fought in the Civil War. He enlisted in 1862 at the age of 50 and was a private in Company B of the 168th Infantry Company in 1862 and 1863. The military records give us a description of Isaac—five feet 11 inches tall, with a light complexion and eyes and sandy hair. These records indicate that Isaac became sick while in the service and was hospitalized in Hampton, Virginia. It may

have ultimately been due to this illness that Isaac died in 1864. His widow, Jane Weed Evans (1812-1898) applied for a military widow's pension in 1868. Isaac and his wife are buried in the Walker Valley cemetery.

Elsewhere we have noted the frequent intermarriage among mountain families, and the Evans family was no exception. In 1819 Stephen's daughter, Elizabeth (1799-1879) married Henry Coddington (1790-1870), who was a son of Joseph Coddington, settler on Lot V (see CHJ – Vol. 14, Issue 3). In addition, in 1824 another of Stephen Evans' daughters, Abigail (1806-1825), married Peter Terwilliger (b. 1800). Her husband was the son of James Fenix Terwilliger (1754-1827) and James' second wife Cassandra (Cassandany) Goldsmith (b.1772) whom he had married ca. 1795. Peter's father, James Fenix Terwilliger (Abigail Evans' father-in-law), was a second cousin of Benjamin P. Terwilliger, who had settled on Lot II at the beginning of the nineteenth century (see CHJ – Vol. 14, Issue 2). Abigail Evans' mother-in-law Cassandra (Goldsmith) was the daughter of Jeremiah Goldsmith, who had settled on Lot III (see CHJ – Vol. 14, Issue 3).

A Child Enslaved: The Walker Family and a Forgotten Chapter of Cragsmoor's History

In 1820, James Walker (1791-1853) and his wife Mary Meakin Walker (1793-1858) purchased a 129-acre portion of John Mentz's original Expense Lot (see the first article in this series). We know that Walker was born in New York State but not where he lived before moving to Cragsmoor. Mary Meakin, his wife, was born in Ireland. Walker's name appears among those of other mountain residents in the 1820 census. He was not listed in the previous census of 1810, thus suggesting that he moved to the mountain around the time he acquired his property there. In the 1820 census, James, Mary, and their son and two daughters, all three under the age of ten, are listed along with an unnamed "male slave," a child most likely of African descent, described as being 14 or younger.

The Walkers were not the only mountain family documented as owners of enslaved men, women or children. The previous census (1810) lists a slave living with a Cragsmoor farmer named Jacob Smith (on Lot VII, see map in previous articles). Because slaves' ages and genders were not recorded until the 1820 census, absolutely nothing is known about this

individual. We also know very little about Smith beyond the size of his household and that he died some time before the 1820 census was taken. Prior to living in Cragsmoor, he may have lived in the Town of Shawangunk, where his name appears in the 1800 census as the owner of two slaves.

Unlike the other early Cragsmoor families discussed in our articles, these two families, the Walkers and the Smiths, lived on the mountain for a relatively brief span of time. What interests us about them, however, is that their presence links Cragsmoor to one of the most shameful aspects of New York State's history, the nearly two centuries during which the institution of slavery was widespread, especially in Ulster County, which sources have described as a place "where slavery died hard." For most of us who associate slavery with the American South, discovering that slavery existed in Ulster County comes as a shock. In fact, according to the 1820 census there were 1500 slaves in Ulster County that year, representing nearly 5 percent of its overall population. The Town of Wawarsing had 45 slaves, almost 3 percent of its population. In the Town of Shawangunk, Cragsmoor's immediate neighbor, there were 247 slaves. This number, representing slightly more than 7 percent of its population, tells us that Shawangunk was the second highest per capita slave owning town in Ulster County. Only in the more densely populated Town of Kingston did enslaved people make up a higher proportion of the population—slightly more than 8 ½ percent.

Who was the enslaved child owned by James Walker? We don't know. He appears as a number on a census record along with his gender and an approximation of his age. One thing is certain; during this period, in this region, his situation was not at all unusual. The 1820 census tells us that at this time, 493 enslaved children under 14 were living in Ulster County. As a result of the conditions under which slaves lived, especially children, most details of their lives were unrecorded and are thus difficult for historians to reconstruct. Fortunately, one of the most famous women in American history, the renowned abolitionist, feminist, orator Sojourner Truth, was born a slave in Ulster County in the 1790s and raised near Rosendale, not far from the Town of Wawarsing. Extrapolating from a mid-nineteenth century biography, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* and a more recent and more accurate biography, Carleton Mabee's *Sojourner Truth, Slave, Prophet, Legend* (1993), we will attempt to use details of Truth's life as a

basis for speculating about the life of Cragsmoor's only known, although nameless, enslaved child.



Sojourner Truth (circa 1797-1883), famed abolitionist, feminist, and orator, born and raised in slavery near Rosendale, N.Y.
Source: *Sojourner Truth Institute Photo Index*, <http://www.sojournertruth.org>

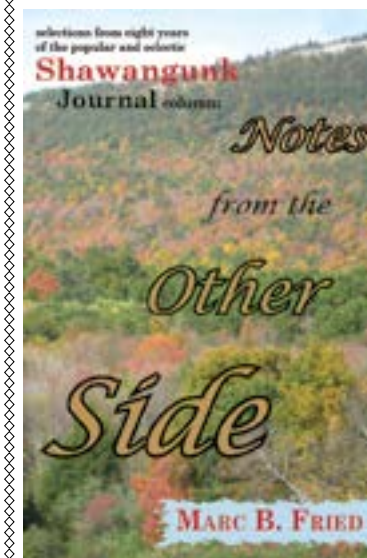
Clearly, the Walker family's child slave was no longer living with his parents. He may have been "sold away" from them, a common experience for children born into slavery. Forcible removal from one's parents was also a theme running through Sojourner Truth's life. Although she had many brothers and sisters, nearly all had been sold away from her parents by the time of her earliest memories. When she was about nine or ten, she was sold at an auction for \$100, along with a flock of sheep. Before she reached the age of thirteen, Truth was sold two more times to local families. She recalled that she "seldom" saw her parents although they lived nearby. While still enslaved, Truth married and gave birth to five children. Later in life, looking back, she would say that slavery had "robbed" her of these children. The intricacies of New York State's

gradual manumission laws were such that although both Truth and her husband gained their freedom in 1827, along with all other adult slaves in the state, her three young daughters remained in legal bondage to Truth's former owner. The law granted enslaved children "freedom" after 1827 only in the narrowest sense, consigning them to indentured servitude until they were in their mid- to late twenties. Thus Truth's three daughters did not become truly free until well into the 1830s. Truth's son, although barely a toddler, had been sold prior to 1827 and transported to Alabama where slavery would remain legal for decades. The successful legal battle that Truth, an illiterate former slave, fought to eventually regain him would become one of the defining experiences of her life.

Why would James and Mary Walker own a slave? Other than Jacob Smith, no other mountain households are documented as engaging in what was then euphemistically known as the "Peculiar Institution." At some level, the Walkers must have believed that there was benefit to be gained from using unpaid slave labor on their farm, even the relatively insignificant contribution that a child might provide. What kind of labor would have this child performed? Again, Truth's life offers some indication. By the age of 13, she was doing domestic as well as farm work. In the *Narrative* she quotes her owner's statement that she "was better than a man—for she will do a good family's washing in the night and be ready in the morning to go out into the field, where she will do as much as raking and binding as my best hands." The 1820 census indicates that James Walker had no grown sons. Thus, like Truth, a young boy such as the Walker's enslaved child most likely assisted with farm work. Nineteenth-century mountain farming required a heavy workload that included clearing fields, building stone walls, plowing, planting, harvesting crops, and feeding farm animals. Women's work was equally strenuous. At the time of the 1820 census, Mary Meakin, who was already caring for three children under the age of ten, was either pregnant with a fourth child or had recently given birth. A child slave would thus not only have helped her with childcare but also with an endless round of household chores including cooking, milking, spinning, weaving, hauling water, candle and soap making, and tending both the garden and the chicken coops. Clearly, early nineteenth-century life on a mountaintop farm would have been challenging for any child, but more so for one who was living apart from his parents and under the conditions of bondage.

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A New Book by Marc Fried



The Cragsmoor Historical Society will host the launch of Marc B. Fried's latest book on Saturday, June 20 at 4 p.m.. Fried is well known for his five books of Shawangunk region history and nature writing. He is, however, also a columnist. His "Notes From The Other Side" has appeared every 3 to 4 weeks for the past 8½

years in the *Shawangunk Journal*, a local weekly. Now Fried has selected and edited the best of these periodical writings and compiled them into a 339-page book that bears his column's title.

Readers who've enjoyed Fried's regional focus will not be disappointed, for there are a wealth of anecdotes, descriptions and historical musings here that relate to the Shawangunks and to the Wallkill and Rondout Valleys. But *Notes from the Other Side* is also filled with exotic adventure, social commentary and engaging humor. There are stories of cross-country hitchhiking, winter mountaineering, overseas travel and fascinating personalities and interactions. These span more than half a century and encompass great diversities of geography and culture—an intimate interweaving of action with retrospection, of radical thought with rural reminiscing, of microcosm with macrocosm - that many will find both entertaining and thought-provoking.

Fried will give a brief introductory talk beginning at 4 p.m., followed by readings from his new work and a book signing. Refreshments will be served; donations accepted.

Cragsmoor Historical Society,

349 Cragsmoor Road, Cragsmoor.

845-647-6487

see the calendar at: www.cragsmoor.info

A SLICE OF FRANCE: FRENCH WINE TASTING AND ART AUCTION



Wine enthusiast David Howell returns to the Society to host another wine tasting gala on Saturday, May 16. This time, he will take his audience on a journey through “A Slice of France,” as he introduces various wines from the cool region of Chablis to the hot Mediterranean region of Languedoc. Inspired by his recent trip to this area, he will include some pertinent geology along the way. Hors d’oeuvres will be served with each wine.

For a perfect pairing of fine wine with fine art, between each tasting Howell will conduct an auction featuring works donated by the family of noted sculptor, Harold Harris. He is best remembered for the elegant sculptures he created from found pieces of brass, bronze, copper, iron and steel. Works by current Cragsmoor artists will also be included.

David Howell is a retired geologist with the United States Geological Survey and professor of Earth Sciences at Stanford University. His research at the USGS involved studies on the growth and shaping of continents, the worldwide distribution of oil and gas, the impact of crowding on the Pacific Rim and the role of art in communicating science. In addition to Stanford, he has taught at Universities in Japan and New Zealand, as well as the University of Paris. The formative years of his childhood and adolescence were carved out on Cragsmoor’s rocky cliffs and along its woodland streams, fertile ground for a career in geology that took him around the world. Howell is also the co-author, with his longtime colleague Jonathan Swinchart, of *The Winemaker’s Dance, Exploring Terroir in the Napa Valley*, published by UCB Press. In reviewing this book about the environmental conditions in which grapes are grown, Rod Smith, a columnist for *Wine and Spirits* magazine, wrote: “Engaging, lucid, substantive, with colorful characters, brand new theories, and the momentum of a detective story ... hard to put down ... a fascinating trip to the heart of Napa Valley terroir.” Howell’s popular wine course at Stanford regularly enjoyed full enrollment.

Before launching his career as an accomplished sculptor, Harold Harris (1922-2003) was an entrepreneur instrumental in developing Channel Master Corp. in Ellenville. His experience in WWII as a specialist in the new radar technology, manning the radar station atop Mt. Suribachi on Iwo Jima, provided inspiration for his innovative designs in television antennas. During this time, he made frequent trips to Japan and Taiwan and became an avid collector of Asian and American art. Harris was also a dedicated historian and wrote several books on local history and folklore, including *Yama Farms: A Most Unusual Catskills Resort* which was completed by his daughter, Wendy Harris, and Dianne Weibe after his death.

Harris’s creative energies during the last twenty-five years of his life, however, were focused on the infinite possibilities of creating metal sculptures, working closely with his skilled assistant, Charles Juneau. Some of Harris’s best-known works were created with fragments of obsolete machinery and industrial artifacts, like fossils from another age, all difficult to locate. His ornate and whimsical chariots were made from decorative metal castings that retained their Victorian and Art Nouveau ancestry.



In all, he created more than 450 compositions incorporating a wide variety of styles, which were exhibited in 45 one-person shows throughout the northeast from Provincetown to New York City. His imposing piece, *Moroccan Outpost*, won the 1994 Woodstock Art Association Outdoor Sculpture Biennial and was on display in the center of the village for two years.

This benefit for the Cragsmoor Historical Society will begin with a preview of the auction items at 4:30, followed by the first tasting at 5 pm. Seating is limited and reservations required. Tickets, at \$30 per person, will contribute to the restoration of the Society’s building to its 1908 architectural style. 349 Cragsmoor Road, Cragsmoor, NY 12420. Information on calendar at www.cragsmoor.info. Reservations at 845-647-6384, sallyhmatz@gmail.com.

Early Cragsmoor cont...

By the time of the 1830 census, the Walkers had left the mountain and were living in the Town of Shawangunk. The census also indicates that their young slave no longer resided with them. A teenager by now, perhaps the Walkers had freed him or perhaps he had run away. Research indicates that in the Mid-Hudson Valley, the number of fugitive slaves had been increasing since 1799, the large majority being males between the ages of 16 and 26. As was the case with Truth’s daughters, by 1827 his status would have changed from slave to long-term indentured servant. Given this dismal prospect, many young adults simply “stole themselves away.”

According to a Walker family genealogy, the family settled in nearby Jamesburgh, the hamlet that by 1862 would bear the family’s name: Walker Valley. The same source describes James Walker as “a shrewd and clever business man [who] by industriously cultivating his farm and clever trading laid the foundation of what became a comfortable resource for the generation following.” James’s 1853 will and accompanying probate documents attest to his economic success. In addition to bequeathing two farms to his sons, he left an amount worth approximately \$121,250 in today’s dollars to his four daughters and three grandchildren. He also gave \$7500 (approximation in today’s dollars) towards the construction of a Methodist Church in Walker Valley, stipulating that the congregation should be responsible for any additional funding. The Walker Valley Methodist Church was dedicated in 1856. In 1908, this building was struck by lightning and destroyed. James M. Walker, the original James Walker’s grandson, led fundraising efforts to replace it with the building that stands at the site today.

We would like to thank Joanne Bierschenk, Laurel Clark, and Pam Yockey, Evans family historians, as well as Kent Tritle and Arthur Fiacco, owners and stewards of the Evans family cemetery, for helping us with our research. Additional thanks goes to Sally Matz of the Cragsmoor Historical Society and Rita Slutsky Helgesen and Lynn Asha Gollither of the Ellenville Public Library and Museum.

As this is the last of our four articles, we would also like to take this opportunity to thank Maureen Radl, Gail Duncan, Robi Josephson and Jim McKenney, who have helped us throughout with editing and production.

THE PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

In spite of another winter to either be forgotten or put on record, the hustle and bustle around the Historical Society has continued. You will see the on-going restoration projects that have taken place when the snow and ice melt and spring events begin.

Even from great distances events planning, the spring Journal issue, and general communication continued all winter long. Now we can look forward to our first event with the return of David Howell to educate us about French wines and to conduct an art auction featuring sculptures by Harold Harris, generously donated to the Society by his children. May 16 is the date for this gala benefit for the CHS. Be sure to mark it on your calendar.

This Journal will conclude the series on the early development of Cragsmoor. Wendy Harris and Arnold Pickman have done superb research to help us understand how Cragsmoor came to be. Our usual spring membership renewal will be included in the summer issue, in order to provide more space for this fascinating glimpse into Cragsmoor’s past.

We have grown in many exciting ways, including the restoration of the building, the collections of historical information, and the informative and entertaining events schedule. Keep in mind the CHS annual meeting and Marc Fried’s book talk, both on June 20, and the Cragsmoor Folies Revisited in July. It’s not too early to sign up to show off your talents. This will be another wonderful summer, and we look forward to sharing it with you.

— Sally Matz, President