

HURLEY HERITAGE SOCIETY

Prologue

"The past is prologue"

April 2022

Glenford

Old Hurley Founded 1662

West Hurley

Greetings, Members & Friends!

Welcome everyone to our Spring reopening. Despite the seemingly never-ending winter, our plans for the 2022 season are falling into place. Opening Weekend is scheduled for Saturday, May 7, and Sunday, May 8, from 1–4 p.m. Our featured exhibit, *Winslow Homer's Hurley: An Artist's View*, has been updated with new Homer artworks that all have significant connections to Hurley, including images of children and farming activities. Gail Whistance, our curator, will be on hand to talk about these additions. No one can make Homer's accomplishments come alive better than Gail. Do not miss this opportunity. Refreshments will be served.

The Event Calendar will be updated on our website and Facebook pages, so please continue to stay connected as our season unfolds. Join our next Zoom Lecture on April 28 (details on page 2). We have scheduled Dutch Clean Sweep Day on May 1. We invite all interested helpers to join us and ready our grounds for the season. The information for the Plant Sale is enclosed. All plants will be pre-ordered and distributed on May 13-14 (details on page 3). HHS will participate in Hurley's Memorial Day Parade; we invite our volunteers and members to join us and share the fun.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL — This is an excellent opportunity to join or renew your membership in the Hurley Heritage Society. The Membership Application for the upcoming year is on the last page of the *Prologue* and can be mailed along with your plant order. Dues and donations may also be paid using credit card, debit card, or PayPal on our website: www.hurleyheritagesociety.org. We count on your support and suggestions.

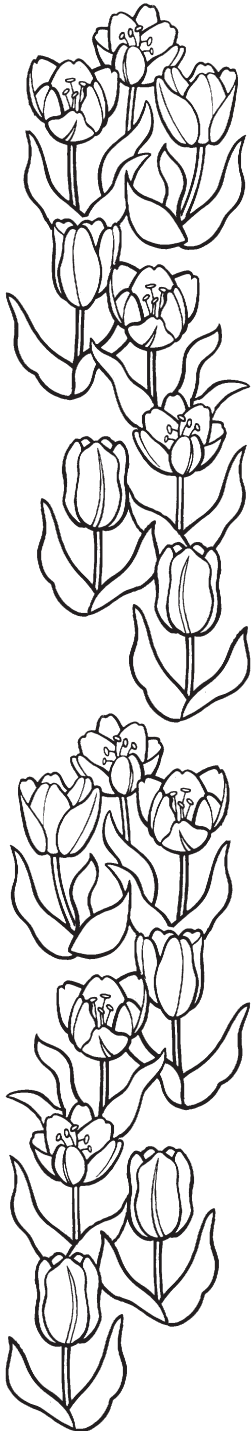
In closing, I want to thank every member, volunteer, and supporter of the Hurley Heritage Society for the past year. Your generosity has been the key factor in sustaining our growth and giving us the opportunity to successfully bring community events to the Town of Hurley. Hurley is truly a treasured jewel of the Hudson Valley.

Sincerely,

Dale S. Bohan

President, Hurley Heritage Society

Dale7228@aol.com



HHS Lecture • April 28, 7 p.m. Online (Zoom)

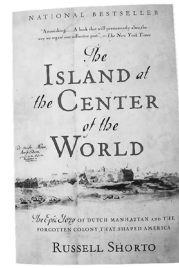
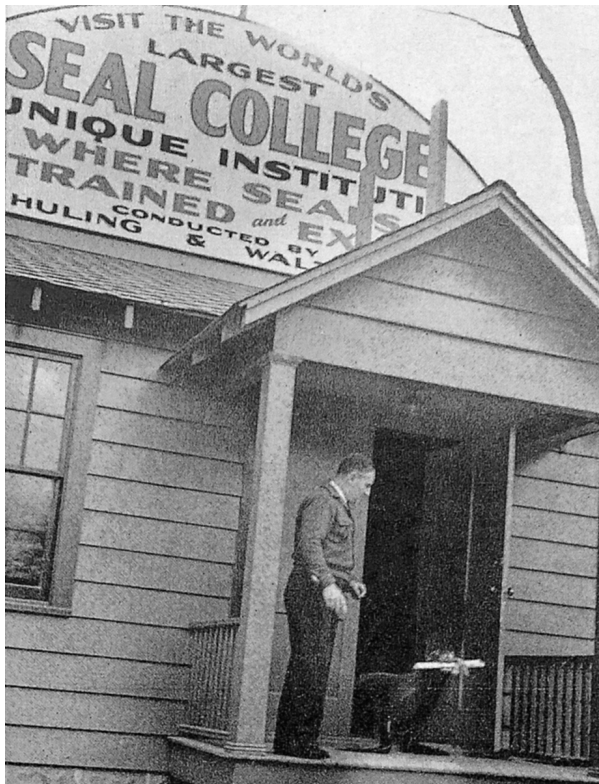
Gary Bohan Presents: Sharkey, the Greatest Performing Sea Lion and the Kingston Seal College

Presented by a native Hurleyite, Gary Bohan, and based on his recently published book, the lecture will focus on the story of Sharkey, the greatest performing sea lion in the history of show business. Sharkey was trained in Kingston, New York, at Seal College, which at the time was the world's largest institute for the training of sea lions. Sharkey shared the stage with practically every important performer of the first half of the twentieth century—from Bob Hope to Ella Fitzgerald, from Broadway to Hollywood and beyond. Learn about Sharkey and his flippered colleagues, with stops at the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, vaudeville

houses, Manhattan Renaissance, movie palaces, and the legendary studios of early radio, movies, and television.

This should be a fascinating story! To join the online lecture, visit www.hurleyheritagesociety.org or visit our Facebook page.

Seal College, Kingston, New York (1939). Photo provided by Gary Bohan.



Museum Gift Shop News

The Holiday Season was an exciting time for the Hurley Heritage Museum. Thanks to you, our loyal community members, our Holiday sale was a great success. And gift shop sales, including online, exceeded expectations. In fact we ran out of some of your favorite items—the Hurley rooster mugs, Hurley ball caps, and the book *The Island at the Center of the World* by Russell Shorto, the epic story of Dutch Manhattan and the forgotten colony that shaped America. All have been reordered and will be here when we re-open in May 2022.

As we review our inventory, we'd like to hear from you regarding any new items you'd like to see in the gift shop. Please contact shopkeepers Joan Castka (845-331-4852, jacastka@aol.com) or Kathy McMahan (845-340-0051, kcmcmahan287@gmail.com) to share your ideas.

New volunteers are needed to work at the shop when the museum opens in May. The shifts will be 1-4 p.m. on both Saturday and Sunday. We'll have training sessions in April. If you're interested in helping out, please let Joan or Kathy know (contact information above) or go to the volunteer link on the HHS website: <https://www.hurleyheritagesociety.org/volunteer/>.

We look forward to spring and seeing you at the Museum and the gift shop.

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: CALLING FOR VOLUNTEERS — LOVE HISTORY? LOVE HURLEY? :
:

The Hurley Heritage Society is looking for volunteers to help with a range of programs including our lecture series, exhibits, decorations, fundraising, and gift shop.

Meet some fun people along the way and help maintain a special community organization and museum.

To volunteer or for more information, please complete our Volunteer Form at www.hurleyheritagesociety.org/volunteer/.





Annual Plant Sale 2022

It's time to think spring! Time to plan your gardening needs.

The Hurley Heritage Society's annual plant sale will be for pre-orders only. Flats, pots, and hanging baskets of beautiful flowers grown by Saunderskill Farms, Accord, can be pre-ordered using the enclosed form. All profits made by this sale go directly to the Heritage Society.

Forward the completed form and mail it together **with payment to Flo Brandt**, 132 Woodland Drive, Hurley, NY 12443. The form must be returned to Flo **by May 1**. Pick up for the pre-orders will be at the Museum grounds on Friday, May 13, 4–6 p.m. There will **NOT** be a plant sale on Saturday, May 14. The backyard of the museum will be accessible on Saturday for those who can't pick up their orders on Friday. There **may** be extra plants for sale that are "left over," and we may have a few herbs and veggies.

Proceeds from the sale will be used for the maintenance of the gardens and grounds of the museum. The pre-orders may be a good way to meet your

flower needs in light of COVID concerns. The society feels we all need a bit of spring to look forward to at this time. Please feel free to call Flo, 845-331-8767, if you have questions or need additional forms.



Photo by Barbara Zell



The Man Who Fell to Earth

by Lorna Smedman

Around 8 o'clock on a Sunday night in February, there was an urgent knocking at the door of the DeWitt farmhouse, the old TenEyck Bouwerie, on Hurley Mountain Road. There were three generations of the family in the house, Abraham and Sarah, their grown daughters Elizabeth and Anna, son Matthew and his wife Cornelia, and one-and-a-half-year-old Anna, born in the fall of 1904. Also present was 16-year-old Sarah Snyder from nearby Eagle's Nest, who had been hired as a live-in house servant. She might have been the one who answered the door, although the whole family would have been wondering who could possibly be out and about on this cold winter night with the threat of snow in the air.

The visitor was a stranger, a slender young man with a handlebar mustache and fashionable tweed cap who was shaking with cold despite his heavy overcoat. However, instead of coming inside, he wanted Matthew to come outside. He kept gesturing towards the field in the back, trying to explain, in his broken English, something about a balloon sailing through the air, demonstrating with hand gestures how something—something round, a balloon—had flown through the air and then—whoosh—had plummeted to the ground, right back there, in the DeWitt's field.

The stranger was Charles Levee, aeronaut, and



Photo of L'Alouette's ascent, West Point, NY, by James H. Hare, printed in *Collier's Magazine*, Feb 24, 1906.

he had arrived at the DeWitt farm at eight o'clock the night of February 11, 1906, via gas balloon. Four hours earlier, at West Point, Levee had hopped into the basket and signaled his friends from the French Aero Club and their counterparts from the newly formed Aero Club of America to release L'Alouette, The Lark, from the heavy sandbags holding the fully inflated phenomenon to the ground. It had taken more than four hours to fill the balloon envelope from the campus's coal gas works, with Levee cautioning them to go slowly because he didn't want the thinly varnished surface of the cotton bag, which was stiff from the cold, to crack.

During these preparations, a crowd had been gathering—

officers and cadets from the Academy, along with some young women who had been invited to a dance the night before, as well as civilians who walked across the frozen river from the eastern shore, altogether a thousand people according to newspaper estimates. Some had come up by train from the city in time to catch the one o'clock takeoff and had been walking around for hours trying to keep warm while liftoff time kept getting pushed out further and further. The VP of the Aero Club of America assured one of the *New York Times* reporters that the thrill of watching the ascent would make the wait worthwhile.

Air balloons were hardly a new idea in 1906. Benjamin Franklin witnessed the flight of an unmanned

hydrogen-gas balloon in Paris in 1783. Allegedly, that balloon came to a violent end when startled peasants hacked the strange object that landed in their field to pieces. Two years later a Frenchman and an American crossed the English Channel in one of these new-fangled vehicles, but aeronautics never caught on in the States as it did in France and Europe.

To help remedy this sorry situation, the Aero Club of America hijacked the exhibition the Automobile Club of America had arranged at the Sixty-Ninth Regiment Armory in New York City the month before by suspending four air balloons from the vast ceiling. The 200 motor cars on view drew huge crowds, but a *New York Times* reporter remarked that “It was a noticeable fact last night that an unusual amount of time was spent in gazing into the air.” The Aero Club had guessed, correctly, that those who had money to invest in this thrilling new four-wheeled technology might also be keen to support aerial escapades. European aeronauts had already set records for highest elevations and fastest speeds. In 1900, Henri de la Vaulx won a long-distance race when he flew from Paris to Kiev—approximately 1,300 miles. Americans had a lot of catching up to do.

Charles Levee was at the armory to represent Maurice Mallet, the Frenchman whose company had built one of the air balloons on display. The 21-year-old Parisian was an experienced aeronaut who had traveled to New York with his own balloon, *L’Alouette*, which had an 11,500-cubic-foot capacity and a 28-foot diameter. Given the late hour and the frigid temperature, everyone expected that this ascension would be brief. Levee’s friend Count de Portanier de la Rochette jokingly suggested they meet at the Waldorf Astoria in Manhattan for dinner after a pilot balloon they sent up caught a southerly wind and headed downriver towards the city.

That was the thing. After the balloon ascended, it was dependent on wind currents for propulsion. If the aeronaut wanted to rise higher to catch a differ-

ent current, they could jettison some of the ballast on board—Levee had a stash of sandbags for this purpose. Attaining a lower altitude was accomplished by releasing some of the gas. After much trial and error, balloon designers developed a rip cord that would quickly release the remaining gas in the balloon when the aeronaut decided to come back down to earth. On this cold February afternoon, the sky was clear and the barometer promised smooth sailing. According to one member of the American club, “You wouldn’t get a day like this in a thousand years for ballooning.”

As it turned out, *The Lark* caught a northerly current when it reached an altitude of 2,000 feet and was headed towards Newburgh at about 12 to 15 miles an hour when it finally passed out of the cheering crowd’s view. Levee had agreed to send the Aero Club a telegram when he finally came back down so arrangements could be made to retrieve him and *The Lark*.

For some reason, Charles Levee didn’t make a landing near Newburgh or Poughkeepsie. Night fell and the moon in the sky was bright, only two nights past full. He was relieved when the wind blew him west of the river since a landing in the cold waters of the Hudson was something he wanted to avoid. He decided to keep going. And going. And going. Once he found a current that was steady and strong,

Levee gave *The Lark* free rein to keep sailing. He wanted to see what his balloon could do. Staying aloft was irresistible.

After he had been in the air for four hours, the wind picked up, bringing with it a mass of clouds. The temperature dropped precipitously. Levee suddenly had zero visibility. It was so dark he couldn’t even read any of the instruments he had on board and had no idea what direction the wind was taking him. He sensed that he had sailed right into a brewing snow squall.

Worried that *The Lark* might be heading back over the Hudson, he began releasing air so he could descend



Charles Levee, 1907

(Continued on page 6)

and start looking for a likely landing spot. Unfortunately, he had no view of what was below him. Forest? Water? A deep rocky cleft? Suddenly he glimpsed a tiny golden light below that suggested a house—his cue to pull the rip cord. The anchor he blindly tossed snagged on something, maybe a rock, preventing the nearly deflated balloon from skittering over the ground with the basket bouncing along behind. Amazingly the apparatus had dropped into an empty field. And at the edge of the field were the lighted windows of the DeWitt farmhouse.

“Charles Levee Makes Balloon Call on Farmer De Witt” was the headline of the story picked up by several newspapers across the country over the next week. Matthew told follow-up reporters that Levee had “seemed somewhat excited, but was much cooler than you would expect a man to be under the circumstances.” In recounting the story of his Hudson Valley adventure, Levee said he would have continued flying for another four hours if he hadn’t met the storm.

In that case, he might have been knocking on the door of some farmhouse in Delaware County at midnight.

The newspapers mentioned that the DeWitt family helped Levee “pack up his balloon and made him comfortable for the night.” This makes it sound easy, but the task of straightening out the deflated cotton bag that was writhing and twisting in the wind and pulling it taut in order to fold it properly would have taken many hands. It wasn’t heavy but it would have required coordinated teamwork and Levee would have made it clear that no one was to step on the fragile material. All this in a cold snowy field in the dark with a fierce wind.

Perhaps the women of the house pulled on their boots and went outside to help. Maybe Matthew sent word to some of nearby farmhands who worked for him.

By the time the bag was folded, the ropes untangled, and the basket lugged back to the house, it would have been quite late.

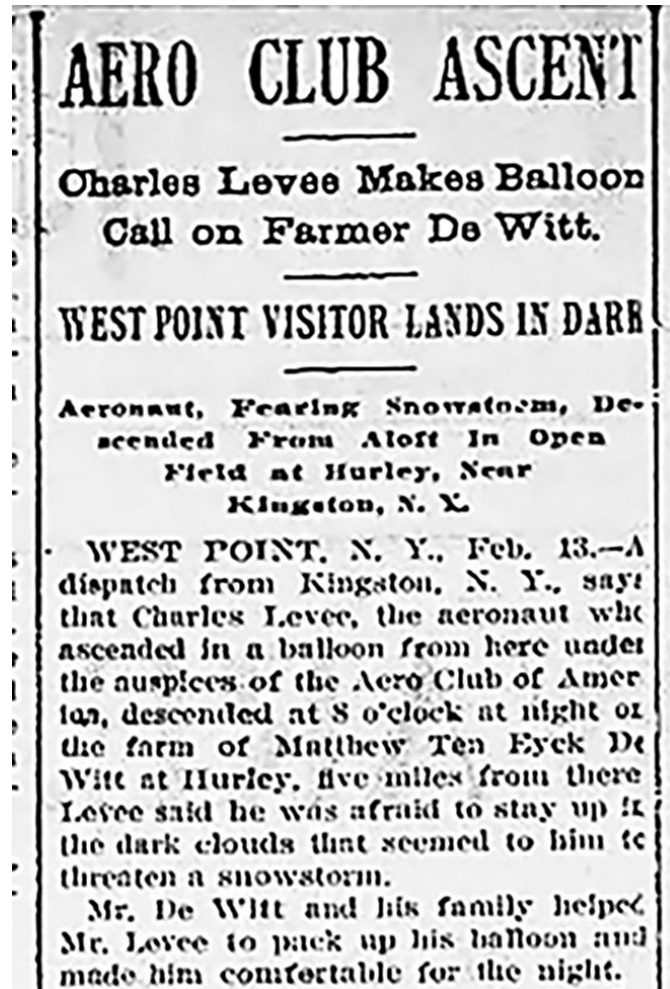
The aeronaut would have been fed—he must have been ravenous. Everyone would have wanted something warm to drink and they might have brought out something special for this guest—whiskey, rum, or who knows, maybe even a bottle of wine since their visitor was from Paris, France. Did Cornelia DeWitt tell him about her French Huguenot ancestors, the de la Montanyes? Sarah and the DeWitt sisters would have hurried to get a bed ready. Levee would have spread out his topographical map so the DeWitts could show him where exactly L’Alouette had landed. They had traveled a distance of approximately 50 miles—not bad for a first flight. Luckily, there was a telegraph at the New York, Ontario, and

Western Railway station in Hurley that had been built in 1902, and plans to send word to the Aero Club first thing in the morning would have been arranged.

Hurley residents who read about Charles Levee’s second balloon flight two weeks later from Tuxedo, New York (which only lasted 15 minutes due to the poor quality of the gas) must have felt a special thrill to see his name in print since the aeronaut now had a special relationship to the town. He was their aeronaut.

His name would appear in the papers occasionally over for the next few years, but the event that put

(Continued on page 7)



From *The West Schuylkill Press and Pine Grove Herald*, Tremont, Pennsylvania, February 24, 1906

The Man Who Fell to Earth *(Cont. from page 6)*

Charles Levee's name in the headlines again wasn't an aerial race or another crash landing. In the spring of 1908, he eloped with Jennie Hawley, the sister of a New York stockbroker who was an early aeronautics enthusiast. The couple went to Paris—by boat, not by air balloon—and the brother promptly sued her for the share of the family inheritance she had taken with her. Newspaper stories followed the nasty court case closely, always leading with the fact that Jennie was 51 and Charles was 23. When her brother's lawyer referred to Charles as a "balloon chauffeur and adventurer," Jennie was quick to set the record straight. "My husband is a small, cultured French gentleman, an aviator, well-educated and speaks four languages." The litigation dragged on for several years. The couple was still together when Jennie died in Paris in 1918; Charles Levee died there in 1940.

In Levee's time, aeronautics was a sport reserved for adrenaline junkies with deep pockets. Wealthy men like John Jacob Astor and William K. Vanderbilt Jr. were among the first members of the Aero Club of America, but so was Alexander Graham Bell, whose tetrahedral box kite was part of the Sixty-Ninth Street Armory exhibit. The field of aviation excited the imaginations of scientists and inventors who were suddenly on the cusp of making this ancient human desire—to defy gravity and fly above the earth—a practical reality. The spectators at West Point had gathered to witness a modern miracle. It was a new century. It was a new world.

The DeWitt household must have been astonished when an aeronaut fell out of the sky that cold February night onto their property, but they might have been skeptical about the usefulness of his flying machine—and relieved that it hadn't crashed through the roof of one of the barns. Air balloons had no practical application for dairy farming. When members of the Aero Club drove to the farmhouse the next day to pick up the aeronaut and his precious L'Alouette, the sight of their automobile must have been just as exciting—or maybe more so—than the deflated balloon they had helped rescue the night before. And who knows—the four-wheeled roadster driving along Hurley Mountain Road that day might have been another first in the town's long history.



Calling all volunteers!

**Sunday,
May 1**

Dutch Clean Sweep Day

- **Bring tools**
- **Dress for gardening**
- **Appear at the museum at 9 a.m. ready to beautify!!**

Memorial Day Parade

The Hurley Heritage Society will be walking in the Town of Hurley Memorial Day Parade this year. The parade will be Monday, May 30. If any members would like to join us, please contact Barbara Zell, 845-338-7686.

Don't forget...

- Renew your membership today.
- Send in your plant sale order form and payment before the May 1 deadline.
- Meet us online for the lecture on April 28.
- Check the HHS website often for news and updates: www.hurleyheritagesociety.org

Hurley Heritage Society
PO Box 1661
Hurley, NY 12443
Tel. (845) 338-1661

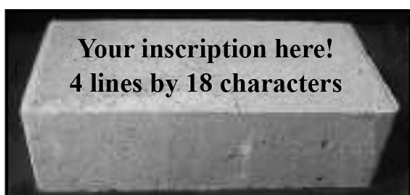
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KINGSTON, NY
12401

OR CURRENT RESIDENT

HHS Heritage Walk

Make a donation of \$120 to the Society to show your support of the museum by creating a brick in your family's name — or to honor someone close to you. The proceeds will be used for capital repairs to the Museum and your brick will be added to the Heritage Walk.

The inscription may be composed with as many as four lines of eighteen characters. If you are interested, please contact Wally Cook at 845-338-2193 or email to wally.cook@gmail.com.



Hurley Heritage Society Membership Form

Name _____

Address _____

State _____ Zip+4 _____

Phone _____

Email _____

- | | |
|---|----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Single membership | \$25.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family membership | \$30.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life membership | \$275.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate (Annual) | \$150.00 |
| Additional donation | \$ _____ |

*Dues and donations are tax deductible.
Contact Bill Ryan, wryan1@hvc.rr.com,
for IBM matching fund information.*

Send payment to:
Hurley Heritage Society
PO Box 1661
Hurley, NY 12443