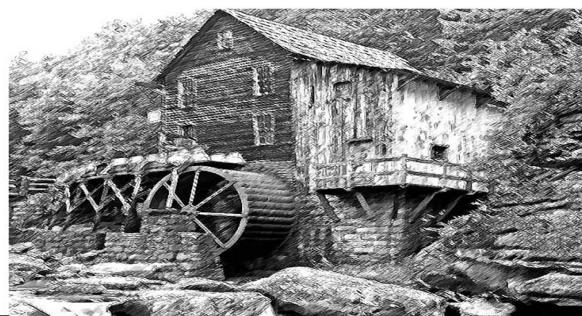


The Gristmill

Saratoga County History Journal



Preserving the History of Saratoga County

Spring 2020

The Summer of 1874 in Saratoga Springs

By Charlie Kuenzel

Saratoga Springs was a wonderful destination in the summer of 1874. The city, and the country were flourishing in the years after the American Civil War. Industry and the development of the western states had started to produce a new group of wealthy Americans who enjoyed the environment of a "Social Summer in Saratoga". The new wealth of the country was interested in the timeless activity of "seeing and being seen" in the social circles of our village in the summer.

The first step to enjoying the summer scene in Saratoga Springs in 1874 was to travel to this great location. Advertisements of 1874 tell us that the use of railroads and steamships from major cities allowed for a relatively quick travel time to our city. In the very early part of the 1800's travel to Saratoga Springs was slow and involved sailing ships and horse drawn coaches. Prior to when the first rail line came to Saratoga Springs, in 1832, it took 8 hours by coach just to travel from Albany to Saratoga. Robert Fulton had added steam ship travel on the Hudson from New York to Albany but mostly sailing ships brought you to New York City. The fact that rail service to Saratoga Springs was the second rail line in the State of New York by 1832 shows the importance of the city as a summer destination. Advertisements in 1874 show that there was daily steamship service from New York City to Troy to allow customers connecting rail transportation to Saratoga all for a cost of \$2.50 per person. The return trip was also easy, as a train left Saratoga Springs every night at 6:45 PM to connect passengers to a steamship leaving Troy at 8:00 PM withar-



Leslie's Weekly, New York Public Library

rival in NYC in the morning.

When visitors arrived in the village they would be met at the rail station on Railroad Place by horse drawn carriages that would transport them to their preferred hotel. In 1874 there were more than 30 hotels in the village and numerous boarding houses that could accommodate between 15,000-25,000 visitors. All the large hotels offered the best in accommodations with the finest food, music and entertainment of the day. Most of these large hotels offered an American Plan that included three meals and a room for about \$2.50-\$3.50 / day. Hotels with names like Congress Hall, United States, Grand Union, Grand Central, Columbian, American, Clarendon, Everett House, and Continental all welcomed guests for stays with durations of days if not weeks.

The year 1874 is a very interesting year in that it is the last year that we as a city have the four largest hotels all operating at the same time. The big four hotels were the

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1874

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Grand Union, Congress Hall, United States, and the Grand Central. On October 1, 1874 the Grand Central would catch fire and in a matter of a few hours it will be destroyed by that fire. The Grand Central was a wonderful hotel that had opened for the first time in the summer of 1872. It had just closed for its third summer when the fire occurred. Located on the south-west corner of Broadway and Congress Street, the Grand Central had a frontage of 580 feet with 650 rooms and could accommodate 1,000 guests. The tables in the dining room were set with \$15,000 worth of silverware and served daily by 150 waiters. In 1874 the largest hotel in the world was the Grand Union located on 7 acres of land that occupied the Broadway frontage from Washington Street to Congress Street and back to Federal Street. The Grand Union had 824 rooms with additional cottages and a dining room that could accommodate 1,200 people at one time with the best food available. The construction of the Grand Union used 12 acres of carpeting, 1 acre of marble tile and produced 2 miles of hallways in the hotel. In 1874 the Grand Union offered music daily on the courtyard lawn at 9:00 AM and at 3:30 PM and nightly hops featuring Prof. J.M. Landers' orchestra.

A travel guide from 1874 made the statement that they felt the "best" hotel was the Congress Hall. That guide states "the gem of Saratoga and one of the finest if not the finest hotel in the country is the Congress Hall". Congress Hall was originally built by Gideon Putnam in 1811-12 and was the site where he fell from scaffolding and later died from complications of that fall. The Congress Hall was rebuilt in 1868 by then owner H.H. Hathorn. It was located on the east side of Broadway from Spring Street to the entrance to Congress Park (East Congress Street). Congress Hall had 416 feet of frontage on Broadway and had two wings that went down Spring

Street and East Congress Street 300 feet in length. The hallways of the hotel were 10 feet wide and the front piazza was 20 feet by 240 feet in size. In the summer of 1874 the Friday evening balls were described as "they surpass all others in America with the music provided by the unrivaled Bernstein Orchestra".

The hotels were the epicenter for daily entertainment but were not the only offerings in Saratoga Springs. John Morrissey had started the Saratoga Race Track in the summer of 1863 and followed with the opening of the "Club House" (Canfield Casino today) in 1870. Since gambling was thought to be a men's only activity, it gave the wealthy men a place to lose their money both day and night in 1874. At the Saratoga Racetrack in the summer of 1874 the Travers was won by Attila, a three-year-old colt owned by American tobacco manufacturer Pierre Lorillard IV. Carriage rides to Saratoga Lake after the daily 2:00 PM dinner, strolls and shopping on Broadway as well as rocking on the porches of the large hotels were all activities that visitors enjoyed. An 1874 brochure on Saratoga stated, "Saratoga is predominantly a fashionable resort, and the city of vanity fair, it is nevertheless Cupid's summer home". Saratoga was the spot for couples to meet and marriage proposals made in this wonderful social environment. Many wealthy families arrived in Saratoga each summer with goals for their visit, and marriage to a person of status and respect for a son or daughter was usually one of those goals.

The number one activity was still taking the mineral waters daily. Many people probably didn't care for the taste of the many mineral springs but drank it daily because it was what you did when you traveled to the number one health resort in America in the 1800's. Many brochures were distributed to guide visitors to the proper use of the springs and the healing power of each. Saratoga Springs had Dr. Whitting who spent a considerable amount of time in his medical practice guiding and prescribing the use of the mineral waters. Most visitors started their day with a walk to the Congress Spring to consume 1-2 glasses before breakfast. It was socially acceptable to be seen "taking the waters".

During the summer of 1874, visitors came to a grand Saratoga Springs that had gas lighting and telegraph service but would need to wait for the telephone until it arrived in the village in 1877. Edison's invention of the incandescent light was not demonstrated at the Grand Union Hotel until 1884 and was introduced to replace gas lighting in the village soon after. Saratoga Springs was continuing to grow with a population of 9,000 people in 1874. There had been a tremendous amount of construction of major buildings in the years prior to 1874, with some of the best residences of the day found on Lake Avenue and Franklin Street. North Broadway would soon explode in development but was not notable in 1874. In 1874 they referred to the "Fifth Avenue" of Saratoga Springs as Circular Street. Saratoga in the summer of 1874 was a great place, just like it is today, 146 years later.



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Editor:

Paul Perreault, Town of Malta Historian, perreault@juno.com

Editorial Board members:

Jim Richmond, SCHR Coordinator,

SaratogaCoHistoryRoundtable@gmail.com

Anne Clothier, Brookside Museum Education Director,
aclothier@brooksidemuseum.org

Lauren Roberts, Saratoga County Historian,
lrroberts@saratogacountyny.gov

Charles Hogan, PhD., charleshogan@nycap.rr.com

Waverly Hall – Ballston Spa's social, entertainment & cultural center in the Nineteenth Century

By Bruce M. Manzer, Ph. D.

Part I – Background

Waverly Hall (later called Gould Hall) was a public building on Bath Street in the village of Ballston Spa located opposite the old Delaware & Hudson railroad station in the rear of the current Stone Soup antiques building. It was the venue for community social, cultural, and entertainment functions in the nineteenth century.

Though largely forgotten now, this Hall then played an important part in the life of the village. It is the purpose of this article to try to give some sense of the importance of community activities 150 years ago by examining the history of the Hall and the kind of events that took place there.

There seems to be little record of this Hall except in the newspaper web site Old Fulton NY Post Cards, and several mentions in Grose's Centennial History of the Village of Ballston Spa (1907). Nearly all the information here was gleaned from these two sources (more than 500 issues of local newspapers were examined). Other than these sources the only trace of the Hall seems to be a few items of ephemera that can be found in the collections of Brookside Museum (photographs of stage performances, programs, etc.).

This article is concerned only with Waverly Hall and Gould Hall. For information on the Hall's successors, the Ballston Refrigerating Company and Tufflite Plastics, see Timothy Starr's *Lost industries of Saratoga County*.

Part II – The Hall

The origins of Ballston's Waverly Hall are lost in the mists of time. It apparently began in the first decades of the nineteenth century succeeding the parlors of the Sans Souci Hotel where meetings and other public events had been held. The earliest mention of it is serving as the site of services for the local Presbyterian congregation while their church was under construction (1834-1835). The next mention is an 1857 newspaper reference referring to it and saying that it had a capacity to seat 600 persons.

Occasionally the Hall was again used by the Presbyterian congregation in the period 1855-1866 while the church was undergoing repairs.

The Hall was the site of all kinds of entertainment: plays, music, conventions, club meetings, etc., throughout its existence. These activities are described in more detail in Part III – Events & Programs.

The Hall changed hands in 1870 when it was purchased by S. Gould a local merchant who used parts of it for storage. It then became Gould Hall and was so known until 1898 when the Ballston Refrigerating Company acquired the building. The National Express Company likewise used it for a time as an office and storehouse.

Gould enlarged the Hall during the 1870s by building commodious additions for a stage and dressing rooms and adding a gallery which increased the seating capacity to nearly 700. He also had new scenery made and redecorated the interior.

In 1882 G. W. Gould purchased the Hall from his father and undertook further improvements, such as additional dressing rooms. In 1884 a roller skating rink was added and in 1888 the roof was replaced and the interior much improved in appearance.

There is almost no indication of the administration of the Hall except occasional references to the manager, a Mr. Wait, the skating rink manager, Mr. Theise, and the board of trustees, no members mentioned by name.

Interestingly, the Hall was sometimes referred to as the [Old] Opera House. Though at one time when the Sans Souci was the site of such events it, too, was referred to as the Opera House.

Part III – Events and Programs Dance

Not only were many public dances held in the Hall but also dances of private clubs like the Utopian Club. Additionally, for those who wished to improve culturally, private instructors were available for voice lessons, painting and dancing. The Dance Academy in Waverly Hall, operated by the Holding Brothers, held classes for ladies, misses and masters, on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons from two until five o'clock. Ladies and gentlemen were instructed in dancing on Wednesday evenings from seven to ten thirty o'clock. Terms per course of ten lessons \$5. Half payable In advance.

And, let's not forget the annual Waverly Hall hop.

Drama

Waverly Hall was the site of many, many plays. Some were put on by traveling troupes, others by local residents. Madison Square Theater Company, The Moore and Vivian theatrical troupe, the Three Wives Comedy Company, the Nugent & Gleason Combination, and the Helene Adell Company all performed there. Local plays were usually produced under the auspices of the Ballston Dramatic & Literary Association although other groups produced plays as well, such as the Good Templars Dramatic Group, the Grand Army of the Republic, the Young Men's Sodality, and the Odd-Fellows Kayadeross Lodge.

Popular plays were "Uncle Tom's Cabin," "Peck's Bad Boy," "The Factory Girl," "As in a Looking Glass," and "The Rebel Spy."

Minstrel Shows

The minstrel show was a form of entertainment developed in the early 19th century. Each show consisted of comic skits, variety acts, dancing, and music performances that depicted people specifically of African descent. The shows were usually performed by white people in make-up or blackface for the purpose of playing the role

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Waverly Hall

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of black people (although there were also occasionally some African-American performers and all-black minstrel groups). The shows were often deprecating and insensitive, but were, nonetheless popular with audiences in the nineteenth century. They were gradually replaced in the late nineteenth century by vaudeville. The minstrel shows were held from 1880-1890, sometimes performed by the Ballston Amateur Minstrels, but more often by traveling troupes, like Benedict & Duprez, Hicks-Sawyer, and the Guy Brothers.

Fairs, Balls, Carnivals and Exhibitions

Fairs, balls, and other similar entertainments were very frequently held in the Hall. The churches of the village were prominent among those holding such celebrations:

The Ladies of the First Presbyterian Church, the First Baptist Church, and St. Mary's Catholic Church often held such activities. The Episcopal Church often held a Christmas Tree service and other celebrations there as did the Young Men's Sodality.

The village's fire companies, too, held celebrations there. For example, the Eagle Fire Company used the hall for their annual ball. Other fire company events were balls by the Starfire Company, the Hovey Hook & Ladder Company, the Matt Lee Hook & Ladder Company, the Union Fire Company and the Union Hose Company.

In addition there were Decoration Day ceremonies, masquerades and fancy dress balls, and occasional benefits such as those of the tannery's Social and Benevolent Society's ball.

Very few exhibitions were held in the Hall. One notable one, however, was held in September 1889 when Prof. Low exhibited the Edison talking machine.

Music and Vaudeville

Frequent concerts were held in the Hall featuring popular and classical music, individual and group singers and instrumentalists.

Singers who performed in the Hall included notably in November 1836 Miss Emma Lajeunesse, then fourteen years of age, who as Madame Albani, became one of the world's greatest singers in grand opera. Her father and sister were at this time residing in Saratoga Springs, and for several evenings she had been singing at a Catholic Fair in St. Mary's hall. Mr. Lajeunesse, the proud father of the great singer, said he would always remember the kindness of the good people of Ballston, and that "my daughter Emma Albani will always be grateful for the encouragement she received at her first concert."

In February 1876 Waverly Hall was crowded to hear the Camilla Ursu troupe, featuring the famous violinist who in response to tumultuous applause played five encores.

Concerts included an occasional Children's Concert,

Amateur Glee Club productions, song recitals, and the Beethoven Trio.

Also appearing were the Norfolk Jubilee Singers, the Doring Concert Troupe, the New Orleans University Singers, and the principals from the People's Standard Opera Company.

Bands that performed included beside the various fire company bands the G. A. R. Band, and the Consolidated Bands.

Vaudeville performances by magicians, mediums, humorists, and variety shows were put on by several churches, including the First Presbyterian Church and the First Baptist Church.

Lectures and Readings

Lectures, while not a mainstay of the events at the Hall formed an important item in its programs. These included such varied topics as the poetry of Lura A. Boies, spiritualism, and Joe Bettys, the spy. I am told that the great Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde gave a lecture here during his American tour in 1882.

Club & Society Activities

The following clubs and societies are frequently represented as holding meetings and other activities in the Hall: the Ancient Order of Hibernians; the Grand Army of the Republic, William H. McKittrick Post no. 46; the Grant & Wilson Club; Knights of Pythias; the Independent Order of Odd-Fellows; the Saratoga County Agricultural Society; the tannery's Social and Benevolent Society, and the Utopian Club.

The International Order of Good Templars held their national meeting in the Hall in February 1880. Their Saratoga Lodge met there in 1883.

Temperance was, of course, a major concern especially in the last two decades of the Hall's existence. Many people signed the Temperance Pledge in the Hall and a number of lectures were held there, heavily attended

Salvationists (members of the Salvation Army) had meetings in the Hall as well as occasional presentations on religion and affiliated topics like spiritualism.

Politics & Government

Although the Hall was not strictly speaking an arm of the government (like a village or town hall), government functions were sometimes carried out there. Politically, it was on occasion a polling place and often the site of both county Democrat and Republican conventions and rallies.

Clubs, like Citizens for Grant, the Tilden and a Hendricks Club often held meetings there, and occasionally Southern Loyalist speakers gave presentations after the Civil War.

Education

The Saratoga County Teachers' Institute met here after 1870. And the Trustees of School Districts 1 and 2 met here in 1885.

Graduation exercises were held in the Hall in 1890 and

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Waverly Hall

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probably afterwards.

Military & Veteran Affairs

On the evening of Apr. 23, 1861, the patriotism of the village men was shown at the meeting held in Waverly Hall to take measures for enlisting a company of volunteers. James M. Cook, prominent in State history for his many important state posts, presided. Fifteen men were selected to have charge of enlisting volunteers. Several meetings were held subsequently to encourage enlistment.

Many Civil War veterans' organizations used the Hall. In 1882 the New York State Department of the Sons of Veterans convened in Gould Hall. There was a reunion of the 115th regiment of the New York State Volunteers at Gould Hall in August of 1884. In 1883 the William H. McKittrick Post no. 46 of the Grand Army, held a fair at the Hall. The McKittrick Post held its third annual camp

fire at Gould hall in March of 1880 and another in 1889.

Sports & Athletics

In February 1885 the new rollerskating rink was the scene of skating exhibitions, competitions, and races. The Hall was also the scene of walking races and athletic exhibitions. Boxing matches were held at the Hall, often with noted pugilists appearing. Max Mallette, the trapeze and slack wire performer, presented an athletic entertainment at one time.

Part IV – Epilogue

By the last decade of the nineteenth century, the ethos of Ballston Spa had changed dramatically. It was now eclipsed culturally and socially by Saratoga Springs. While Saratoga had become thought of as: "Health, History, & Horses" Ballston had turned to industrial and commercial development. Saratoga's grand hotels and Convention Hall (which had opened on September 18, 1893) were now the social and cultural venues of the county. The basement remains of the Hall are still visible and may be the site of a future rebuilding project.

Waterford, A Good Place.... A Better Tug

Chapter 9 of **Russell VanDervoort's** book *Canal Canaries and Other Tough Old Birds*. Russ is the Town of Waterford Historian

Waterford can boast of many things, as many canal towns can. No attempt will be made here to list its many attributes. Established by Dutch traders many years ago, it is the oldest incorporated village in the State of New York and was a successful village within the County of Saratoga long before "the ditch" was even dreamed of, although the dream was promulgated as early as 1797.

Waterford's ability to be commercially involved worldwide was greatly enhanced by the advent of the great canals. The resulting activity created vast opportunities in many fields of endeavor. All of the traffic going north or south and much of the traffic going east or west, traveling through either by design or destiny, would stop or layover at Waterford. Design, because the port was a good place to stop. Repairs could be made, supplies could be purchased, banks could be accessed, and hotels and taverns were plentiful. Destiny, because the canal might be so busy that you were stuck in a crowd of boats for a day or more. Sometimes a mule team just wasn't available. Perhaps repairs were being made to a lock or a canal bank. The river might be too high for safe navigation at some seasons of the year. The list of possibilities to cause an unwanted layover is only restricted by the imagination. Since 1823, with the opening of the Champlain Canal, Waterford has been a busy port, it still is. A visitor to the Waterford Visitor Center anytime between April and October witnesses a wide variety of boats still enjoying the

amenities of Waterford and its surroundings almost two centuries later.

It is only fitting that a community so tied to the canal systems and rivers in New York State should have a tug named in its honor. There are many longtime canal families in Waterford and, as time sails on our numbers are diminishing. All of these families have had history and achievements that made Waterford a better place. The tug Waterford could tell many tales if we could unlock her secrets. Some of my favorite tales involve the tug Waterford.

There has been more than one tug Waterford. The original was destroyed by fire in 1920. As fate would have it, Louis VanDervoort Sr. served as captain on the original tug Waterford for a very short time. His service was believed to be a one trip fill in for someone who was temporarily unavailable. Many years later, in about 1954, William D. VanDervoort became engineer on the new tug Waterford and continued in that capacity for many years. His son, William D. VanDervoort Jr., never actually worked on the Waterford, but he spent time on her with his father and did act as a deckhand on several trips, although unpaid in the 1950s. His son, Russell W. VanDervoort worked two seasons as a deckhand on the tug Waterford in the mid-1970s. Finally, Russell's son, Ryan William Diefendorf VanDervoort was a guest deckhand on the tug Waterford in the annual Waterford Tug Boat Roundup Parade in 2003 from the Port of Albany to the Port of Waterford. This trip partially retraced his

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Waterford

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great-great grandfather's journey of one hundred years before. Ryan's trip also meant that five generations of the Van Dervoort family had served in some capacity on the same-named, although different, tugs Waterford.

There is no shortage of stories concerning the tug Waterford. When I first went to work as a marine helper for the State of New York, I was assigned to the shore gang on the dredge crew. At that time, my home was a duplex, with my grandfather occupying one side and me the other. On my first day home from work, my grandfather is watching out the window for my arrival. He is anxious to know about my new job. Once I told him "shore gang," he didn't want to hear anymore. "Shore Gang!" he hollered. "Who the hell's in charge up there?" I said, "I don't know, somebody whose name sounds like coffee." "Coffe!" he yells again. "Do you mean Ralph, Ralph Folger?" "I replied yes, I think that's it."

My grandfather then demanded the phone, a nice, old, black, rotary dialed phone and says dial this number. My grandfather had been retired now for about fifteen years and still has the State Dry Docks phone number in his head. I called the number and handed him the phone.

My grandfathers says, "Ralph, Ralph, is this you?" Of course, I can only hear one side of the conversation. "Ralph. This is Will VanDervoort." There is a long pause, obviously, Ralph catching up with my grandfather. "Look, Ralph, my grandson went to work up there today and you got him on that god-damned shore gang! When he goes to work tomorrow, you put him on a tug, preferably the tug Waterford!" The next day I was assigned to the Waterford. What was not known to me then, but was explained to me later, was that in the hierarchy of new canal society, the shore gang was thought, at least by my grandfather, to be the lowest rung, and it was unacceptable to an old dirty necked canaler to have his grandson at this level. I believe it also demonstrated the influence that the family still wields, seventy years after their arrival on the canal scene.

When I reported to the tug Waterford, I was introduced, formally, to another iconic member of a tug boat family, Captain Meridith Connors. I already knew Cap, he just didn't know me. Cap, Cap Connors, or Blondie, all the same person. On initial orientation, I was told, "Keep the brass polished, the cobwebs cleared and be ready to learn and do whatever you are told!" "So, VanDervoort," Cap says, "Who is your father?" "Bill VanDervoort," I responded. "Bill VanDervoort." "Hmmm, who is Will VanDervoort?" "That's my grandfather." "Well, how about Al VanDervoort?" "That's my great uncle" "Well, let me tell you this kid, my first job on the tugs was working with Al VanDervoort and now you are here working for me." Cap Connors and his family, and my family were both legendary on the canals. We both thought that this

was an interesting turn of events. Cap had worked many years as a river and canal tug boat captain east of the Mississippi. He had passed the mandatory retirement age for commercial tugs, but could still work for the state. He referred to working in the canal like a kid playing with boats in the bathtub.

Upcoming Programs at the Saratoga County Historical Society at Brookside Museum

Saturday February 22 1-3 PM Creating Oral History As part of SCHR's Oral History initiative, members of the Rutgers University Oral History Team will present a program on how to capture and present historical narratives

Thursday, March 19 7 PM – Genealogy Workshop SCHR and Heritage Hunters of Saratoga County join together to present a Genealogy Workshop. Attendees will learn the basics of internet genealogical research using records of the Saratoga County Poorhouse ca 1900.

Wednesday April 15 7 PM -The Brothers Low – Sam McKenzie, Brookside museum researcher, will discuss the lives of Isaac and Nicholas Low, successful 18th century merchants and land speculators. Their divergent paths and their influence on the early history of Saratoga County will be examined.

For more information visit saratogacountyhistory-roundtable.com

Working off your taxes - Town of Malta

None of us like to pay taxes, even to fix our roads. Well, would you rather do the work yourself?

The first New York State law on highways and bridges was passed in 1797. In what was known as the "Labor System", property owners were expected to do the work themselves.

A Commissioner of Highways would appoint Overseer of Roads for each specific section of roads and assess the adjoining land owners a number of days labor depending on the value of their property. This system was still being used in Malta as late as 1905. In that year property owners along the road "beginning at the Methodist Church and running east to the end of the road" were assessed from 1 to 10 days and told to show up with their own tools in April. In addition, property owners were expected "to cause all the loose stones, lying on the beaten path to be removed every month from April to December."

Those unable or unwilling to perform the work, were taxed a dollar a day.