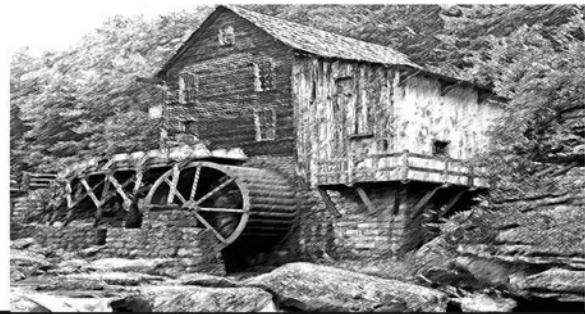


# The Gristmill

Saratoga County History Journal



Preserving the History of Saratoga County

Summer 2021

## Ira Thomas: Ballston Spa's Baseball Hero

By Dave Hubbard

The longest running myth of the founding of baseball is that Ballston Spa-born Abner Doubleday, in 1839, wrote the rules, and designed the playing field "diamond" and the field regulations. There were no written records found to support this claim from Cooperstown, New York. In 1839, when Doubleday was purportedly inventing baseball in Cooperstown, he actually was in West Point at the United States Military Academy, preparing for a great career in the military, including outstanding service to the Union Army in the Civil War.

New York State recognized him with a statue at Gettysburg. Earlier, Doubleday, participated in the Mexican-American War and the Seminole Indian wars in Florida.

However, Ballston Spa did produce one major league baseball player of whom very few know. Yet, this major leaguer was included in the first class of players, coaches, and umpires and inducted into the Capital District Baseball Hall of Fame. Meet Ira Felix Thomas, who was born in Ballston Spa on January 22, 1881.

Ira had an older brother, Al, who, by Ira's own admission, was the better ball player. "My brother Al was older than I," said Thomas. "And one of the greatest natural ball players I have ever seen. In my opinion he would have been a star if he had not been injured." Al was a pitcher and Ira knew he was good but a little wild. He felt it was something that could be corrected with practice. However, as his brother's catcher, Ira saw no benefit to himself. Ira's mother helped him see the error of his way.



Ira Thomas 1881-1958

"She gave me one of the heartiest and most thorough spankings I have ever had, and after that Al got all the practice he needed." How did Thomas feel about this treatment from his mother? "Not only did that first lesson make a player out of me, but it determined my position as well. At any rate, a catcher I had to be and a catcher I have been ever since."

While in Ballston Spa, the brothers Al and Ira played for a team known as the Monitors. Al was the pitcher, and Ira was his catcher.

"There was Al, much better than I; in fact my only part in the program was to help him on his career so far as I was able, and yet Al never played in the majors, and I have been a hanger-on around the genial campfire for so many years."

"I got the first opportunity at professional baseball,

Continued on next page

# Ira Thomas

## Continued from previous page

playing for Springfield in the Connecticut League. He was off to a good start and had attracted several big-league scouts, who felt Al would be on his way to the majors the following season. Unfortunately, he suffered an arm injury in which he strained the ligaments in his pitching arm and left him unable to pitch any more. Many, including scouts, thought Al was a good enough athlete to continue in professional baseball at another position, but if he could not pitch. Al had no interest in continuing to play the game."

Younger brother, Ira, got his first chance in the Connecticut League in 1902, although it was not much of a chance. Ira joined a team in Hartford, Connecticut, as a catcher but only got to watch. As Ira stated, "but anyway the management held on to me with one hand, and the next season they gave me a try-out again." Thomas took part in 94 games in 1903 for Hartford and his performance allowed him to move up in the fall to Newark, New Jersey, of the Eastern League. While at Newark he caught for future Hall of Fame pitcher Ed Walsh. In 1904 and 1905, Thomas played in the Eastern League for Providence, Rhode Island. In the second year, the team won the Eastern League championship.

"My best year was 1911, and 1905 my worst." Despite Providence, winning the championship in the Eastern League, personally 1905 was a bad year for Thomas. When he slid into third base, the third baseman jumped on him, his spikes tearing muscles in Thomas' arm and shoulder. For nine months he could not properly throw a baseball.

After the 1905 season, he moved up to the major leagues with the New York Highlanders in the American League. The Highlanders would become the New York Yankees. Thomas spent the 1906 and '07 seasons with the Highlanders before spending the 1908 season with

the Detroit Tigers. His final major league stop as a player was from 1909 through 1915 in Philadelphia with the Athletics.

While with Detroit in 1908, Thomas got to play in the World Series, and on October 10, 1908, he became the first pinch hitter in a World Series game to get a hit. He was pinch hitting for Charley O'Leary. Thomas was not the first pinch hitter in a World Series game; there had been twelve previous pinch-hit attempts including the batter just prior to Thomas, but Thomas was the first to get a hit.

Two years after his first appearance in the World Series, Thomas again found himself in the World Series; this time with the Philadelphia Athletics.

The late Catherine King Eddy, a relative of Ira Thomas, has had a baseball from game one in the 1910 World Series between the Athletics and the Chicago Cubs which she called, "This is my most prized possession."

Mrs. Eddy's baseball is inscribed:

"1st game of World Series, Monday, October 17th 1910 – To my uncle Lacy King from Ira Thomas. Athletics: runs 4, hits 7, errors 2. Chicago: runs 1, hits 3, errors 1."

Along with the above inscription are Thomas' autograph and autographs of eight other Athletics and twelve Chicago Cubs, including six future Hall of Famers. Those future Hall of Famers were Eddie Collins, Frank "Home Run" Baker and Chief Bender of the Athletics, and from the Cubs, Mordecai Brown, Joe Tinker, and Frank Chance.

The 1912 season brought new challenges for Ira Thomas. As his playing time was lessened; his coaching duties for Connie Mack continued to grow. Thomas was Mack's bench coach, pitching coach, and first base coach, as well as a player. Mack was not pleased with the performance of his team and, in particular, his catching staff. Thomas, his most reliable catcher, "has been in poor condition all year."

Ira Thomas officially retired in June of 1915 and became a full-time coach for the Philadelphia Athletics. He also became a scout for the Athletics and bought and managed a minor league team in the Texas League from Shreveport, Louisiana. While managing in Louisiana, Thomas discovered future Hall of Famer Al Simmons, whom Mack signed based on Thomas' recommendation. It was also at the urging of Thomas that Mack signed Robert "Lefty" Grove, who went on to become one of the greatest pitchers of all times.

In 1917, Thomas signed a five-year contact with Williams College to manage the college's baseball team. When school was not in session, he did scouting for Connie Mack.

On October 11, 1958, Ira Thomas died. He is buried in the same Philadelphia cemetery as his friend and former manager, Connie Mack. His obituary in the *New York Times* noted, "He was the captain and catcher of the Athletics world championship teams of 1910, 1911, 1913 and 1914."



Preserving the History of Saratoga County

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# The Spirited Times of Samuel Hides

By Dave Waite

You may not know his name, but Samuel Hides was one of the most interesting men in Ballston Spa in the mid-nineteenth century. Hides first surfaces in Ballston Spa as a blacksmith in 1831, when he announced the opening of a shop for general “Smithy” business, “fully equipped for doing the best work.” This business was likely housed in the brick shop on the east side of Milton Avenue that he leased from Stephen Smith in 1832. Two years later Smith sold Hides the lot and brick shop, as well as an adjoining 20-foot-wide parcel for eleven hundred and forty-five dollars.

In 1838, Samuel Hides increased his property holdings in the village when he bought the parsonage and lot on High Street from Christ Church in Ballston Spa. Over the next several decades, Hides would buy and sell parcels throughout the village, sometimes partnering with Ballston Spa attorney George Scott in the purchase.

From Town of Milton Census Records, we learn that Hides was born in England around the year 1805, was a naturalized citizen, and had come into the area in 1829. By 1842, he married Mary Elizabeth Flint, a woman fourteen years younger than Samuel, whose family lived in Schoharie County, New York. There is a possibility that Samuel Hides had been a widow when he married Mary Elizabeth, as a deed filed in 1835 lists Samuel Hides and his wife Susan as selling property on Milton Avenue that Samuel had purchased from Stephen Smith the year before.

Samuel Hides was a charter stockholder of the Ballston Spa Bank, where he was elected as a director in 1838. He would hold this position several times over the next 15 years. He also served as a trustee of the Spa Sanatorium on High Street in 1852. The Hides’ first child was Samuel H., born in 1842, followed by Mary E. in 1845, Adaline Susan in 1849, and Louisa in 1852.

## Spiritualism comes to Ballston Spa

It was during the early 1850s that Hides became involved in Spiritualism, an interest that would greatly influence the rest of his life. Spiritualism is a form of religion based on the belief that spirits of the dead can communicate with the living. The roots of the spiritualist movement can be traced to central New York residents Kate and Margaret Fox, who in 1848 claimed to have contacted the spirit of a murdered peddler. In 1853, a Massachusetts doctor by the name of Barron is said to have visited Ballston and met with fellow spiritualists to tell of his contact with the spirit of Benjamin Franklin. The spirit had directed him to buy a certain piece of property where he would find a mineral spring that would contain “great medicinal powers.” It is said that after a real estate investment of \$1,000 and months of effort no spring was ever located. No deed for property in the name

of Barron was ever filed in Saratoga County during that time that would prove if this event ever took place.

This was not the first time that the spirit of Benjamin Franklin had been in contact with spiritualists. For a week in February of 1850, Mrs. Rachael Draper, a medium from Rochester, New York was the channel for Franklin to communicate with a group of Spiritualists that included Margaret Fox. The method of communication chosen by the spirit was tapping out messages in Morse Code. The revelation imparted by Franklin was:

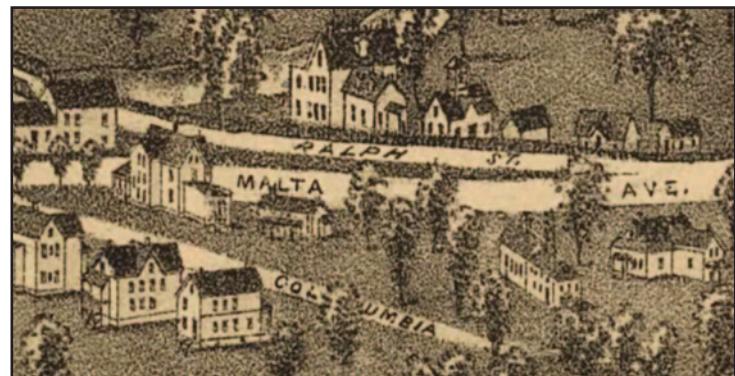
*There will be great changes in the nineteenth century. Things that now look dark and mysterious to you, will be laid plain before your sight. Mysteries are going to be revealed. The world will be enlightened, I sign my name Benjamin Franklin.*

Soon after Hides purchased this farm, Milton resident and spiritualist John Mitchell contacted the spirit of Benjamin Franklin and learned that on Hides farm would be found “a spring of remarkable medicinal value which would be ‘for the healing of the nations’.” It would be sixteen years before the work of drilling for the spring was started.

Samuel and Mary’s fifth child, Grace was born in 1857. Tragically, Samuel’s wife, Mary Elizabeth, died in January of 1858, leaving Samuel alone to care for their young family. The next year Samuel’s oldest child and only son, Samuel H., died at the age of 17. Tragedy again hit the family in 1864, when Samuel’s daughter, Mary Elizabeth also died. The loss of his children continued, with eleven-year-old Grace C. passing away in 1868, and seventeen-year-old Louisa passing away in 1869. Of the five children born to Samuel and Mary, only twenty-year-old Adaline remained.

## The Franklin Spring

From the beginning, the spirit of Ben Franklin was consulted before making any decision concerning the work on the well. It was said that even the business that did the drilling, the Artesian Well Company, had been chosen by the spirit. When Mitchell was questioned about his respon-



1898 Birds-eye view of the Samuel Hides Farm

Continued on next page

# Hides

Continued from previous page

sibility in these decisions, he gave this response: *I had communication with Franklin at the spring, at my house and Hides'; Mr. Hides had full faith in me as a medium, and as far as I know, was obedient to the instructions of Franklin, and as I understand it all his acts done there were under the instructions of Franklin.*

After a year of effort and sending the five-inch drill to the depth of 715 feet, a strong flow of mineral water burst out of the well shooting 50 feet in the air. Some newspapers later mocked this effort by suggesting that if they had even been an inch short of the spirit's demand the project would have failed. This well was named for the one who had revealed its location. Over the next two years, ten more wells would be drilled, with only one of these proving to be successful. This second mineral spring, named the Columbian, was said to have been drilled by the direction of the spirit to the same depth as the Franklin Spring.

In the summer of 1868, after they had been drilling for several months, Samuel Hides and John Mitchell brought Elisha Comstock in as their financial backer and one-third partner in the mineral spring. The agreement defining this three-way partnership was written on November 1, 1870, though it was not filed in the County Clerk office until two years later. This document also included setting aside sufficient land on the farm for a shelter over each of the mineral springs that had been dug and one "bottling house" for the two universal springs."

In the same year that Franklin Mineral Spring was tapped, Elisha Comstock's son, Abijah, married Samuel Hides' daughter Adaline, a change that would over time put control of the springs into the hands of this couple. In another change in ownership, John Mitchell's one-third part in the mineral spring was conveyed to his wife Cornelia in November of 1870.

In a surprising turn of events, in 1872 Samuel Hides brought a lawsuit against Elisha Comstock over what he perceived as an uneven distribution of profits from the mineral spring. Comstock contended that Hides had agreed to sell him the property where the spring was located for \$50,000 as part of the reimbursement for the \$13,000 spent drilling the well.

**JUST ONE INCH MORE.**  
**Spirits at the County Seat. — Benjamin Franklin's Spirit in the Mineral Water Prognostication Business.— Hyde and Comstock, vs. Debtor to Luck Thro' a Medium, &c., &c.**

*Daily Saratogian, April 9, 1873*



**Hides-Franklin Spring Cobblestone Bottling Building**  
Courtesy: The Way We Were Collection, Saratoga County Clerk

Many of the newspapers used the testimony of Hides as an opportunity to express their opinion of the spiritualists and the movement itself, a good example was this from the *Troy Daily Times*:

*That men can be found who hold to the opinion that a single man is so endowed with the spirit that he possesses the power of life and death over them is a little short of marvelous and shows the extent to which a delusion of this character will sometimes lead men.*

In July of 1873, a correspondent for the *Albany Evening Times* stopped at Franklin Springs to sample the mineral water. It was Samuel Hides himself who served him a glass full, taken directly from a pipe coming out of the floor of the spring house. The reporter found the taste "not much better or not much worse than most of the mineral waters," and handed the glass back still half full. Along with offering a taste of the spring water, Hides had a display of spiritualist literature that included *The Banner of Light* and other periodicals. Samuel was very willing to discuss both the history of the mineral springs as well as his belief in Spiritualism, the writer noting that this would "take days to tell" and that Hides seemed willing to take the story right to the end.

## A Short-lived Marriage

In 1879, a self-proclaimed clairvoyant physician by the name of Mrs. Dr. Mary Mann arrived in Ballston Spa to offer her services as a healer to the community. Setting up her business in a downtown hotel, she was soon introduced to Samuel Hides, at that time in his seventies, frail and nearly deaf. Realizing his disability, she expressed

Continued on next page

# Hides

## Continued from previous page

her belief that she could restore his hearing and offered her services. On his first visit, she fell into a trance, after which she announced that the spirits had assured her of success in restoring his hearing. Even with the promise from beyond, Samuel felt her fee, fifty dollars a month for three months and another five hundred once he regained his hearing, was too high and turned her down. Two days later, this spiritual physician showed up at the Franklin Spring and persuaded him to become her patient. Her methods, which were said to include fingers poked into ears and bizarre arm motions, seemed to have won over the aged man. Along with these treatments, the subject of marriage was raised, with Mary assuring Samuel that "it was a decree of the spirits that she should become his wife." Along with marriage, the spirits also insisted that his farm and rights to the mineral springs should be deeded to his bride-to-be as a dowry.

While it seems that Hides was open to the idea of marriage, especially as her offer was given while she sat on his lap and showered him with kisses, he held back, expressing concern about his age. This concern was easily addressed by Mary who fell into a trance. Here she was given assurance from the spirits that if the marriage occurred in the next two weeks it would bring him great happiness, two more children, and twenty more years of life. The couple was married on September 22, 1879, by a Baptist Minister in Saratoga Springs. To be legally married, Mary would have had to reveal her real name, Mary McMahon, an act that marked the beginning as well as the end of their relationship. While the property was to be her dowry, for some unexplained reason the deed for the farm and mineral springs was not filed in the county clerk's office until a year later.

After only ten days of marriage the new bride began to abuse the elderly Hides and to protect himself, he drove her out of their house at gunpoint. By December of 1880, Samuel Hides had begun legal action against his bride to have the marriage annulled and transfer of property rescinded.

The case dragged on through the courts for over two years, with each session revealing more and more evidence against McMahon. At the center of it all was her portrayal of herself as an "unmarried and pure woman" to draw Samuel into marriage. The reality was far different. Mary had started life as Mary Brady, who in 1856 had married Mike McMahon, by whom she had four children. By 1873, she had abandoned this family and was found living with a man named Laundry. In this relationship, she also had a child. She soon decided that he was "played out," and left both him and her child. Next, she brought a lawsuit against a man who she accused of "seducing her." In 1877, she was reported as living with a

man named Hendricks. This evidence was more than sufficient for the judge to decide in favor of Samuel, and by early in 1883 the marriage was annulled, and the transfer of property was noted as canceled in the Saratoga County Clerk's office.

In 1883, still using the name of Hides she was making a living as a clairvoyant in Troy. When asked why she continued to use the name Hides, she optimistically replied that she would use the name until she was forced to stop by the courts. Concerning her future with Samuel Hides, she boasted, "I will live with him yet before he dies." Apparently, her skills as a clairvoyant were lacking, as this prediction never materialized.

## MRS. MARY HIDES

### Clairvoyant and Magnetic Healer.

Cures all curable diseases by her wonderful magnetic power. If the case is incurable he takes no money. Business tests also given in all cases of human nature. Prices according to circumstances of patients. Special attention to female difficulties, and she has never failed to make a perfect cure. Reliable testimony of her wonderful cures can be given at her office.

No. 3 1-4 Broadway, Directly Opposite  
Mansion House, Troy, N. Y.

*Lansingburg Courier, March 29, 1884*

After the lawsuit against McMahon was settled, Samuel Hides transferred the title to his farm and mineral springs to his daughter Adaline. In 1885 she laid out a street through her farm from Malta Avenue to High Street. She planned on naming the new street Hides, in honor of her father. The road has since been renamed Hyde Boulevard.

On September 8, 1888, the eighty-two-year-old Samuel Hides, died at his daughter Adaline's home on Pleasant Street in Ballston Spa. His obituary noted that he was a "confirmed Spiritualist" and the owner of two mineral springs. Buried in Ballston Spa Cemetery, he is at rest next to his wife Mary Elizabeth and four of their children.

*I want to thank Avonlea Stiles, Assistant Director for National Bottle Museum in Ballston Spa for her assistance in searching the museum's archives for information about bottling at Franklin Springs. I also want to thank Isobel Connell, Trustee and Education and Programs Chair at the Saratoga County History Center at Brookside Museum in Ballston Spa for locating Bernard Puckhaber's 1968 Gristmill article on the Franklin Spring.*

*Online sources: Ancestry.com genealogy and census records Newspaper archives at nyshistoricnewspapers.org and fultonsearch.org Illustrations: Birds-eye View of Ballston Spa, Library of Congress Geography and Map Division One Inch More, Daily Saratogian, April 9, 1873 Hides Franklin Spring cobblestone bottling building, saratogacountyny.gov, edited to reflect the time of construction. Mrs. Mary Hides advertisement, Lansingburg Courier, March 29, 1884*

# History of Mount McGregor

By Gene Phillips

The Palmertown Mountain Range stretches from Lake Champlain to near North Broadway in Saratoga Springs. Glen Mitchell Hotel would use its southern foothills for a toboggan slide from 1886 -1890. Ringling Brothers erected their 3 ring big top in the valley in the 1950's. Early Native Americans established trails along its base for hunting, villages, and war. Palmertown Peak was the highest point on the chain at 1,200 ft. above sea level. Queen Ann granted patents in the Kayaderosseras Patent to thirteen individuals in 1708 who paid taxes to the Queen, but the area remained unsettled for sixty years. British loyalists used the peak to signal the movement of colonists to British Forces in Fort Edward during the American Revolution.

Shortly after the Revolution young Scottish immigrants, James & William McGregor settled in the valley below Palmertown Peak. James and his wife Elizabeth would raise a family of 12 in Wilton including a son Duncan McGregor born in 1808. Duncan McGregor would become a well-liked gracious business man in many venues in his native Wilton and also in Glens Falls where he moved in 1868. He served on many community and agricultural boards in both locations. He operated the family farm and a steam powered sawmill in the valley. Oscar Coles, Mayor of Aikens South Carolina, was a regular summer visitor (40+ years) to Saratoga escaping the heat and humidity of the South. He spent much of his time as a nomad wandering thru the countryside on foot, hitching rides with local farmers back to Saratoga in the evening. One journey brought him to the top of Palmerton Peak. The views were majestic and inspiring which he energetically communicated to local residents including authoring articles for the *Saratogian* newspaper.

Duncan McGregor, inspired by Mayor Coles accounts, seized on the opportunity to expand his ancestral holdings by buying the tract (1,000 acres) of the mountain thru payment of back taxes to NYS on Nov. 29, 1861. McGregor first logged the mountain top transporting the logs to local saw mills including his own. This expanded vista brought folks from surrounding communities to the mountain top seeking relief from the heat of the city. The pure fresh air devoid of ragweed also provided relief from Hay Fever and other respiratory ailments. The trip was rugged with only logging routes to the summit, however people made the trip.

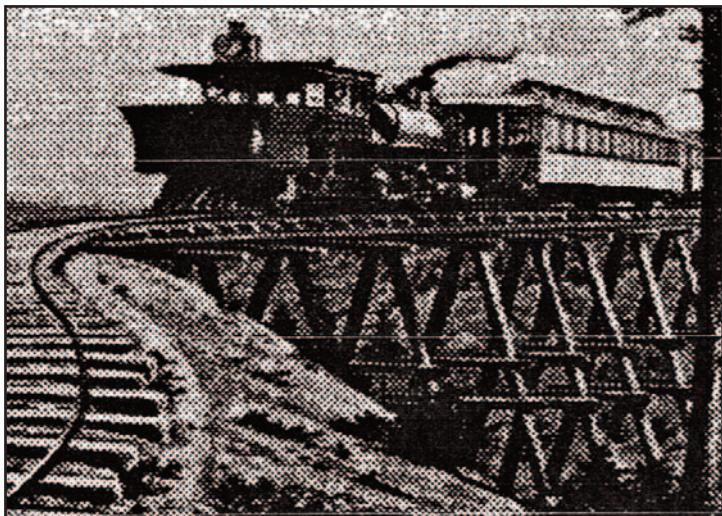
Mr. McGregor recognized the promise of a mountain top resort embarking on the construction of a firm gravel road to the peak in the early 1870's. Rev. R.C. Adams of Wilton approached McGregor as the road construction ended requesting permission to hold a Sunday School Picnic at the peak. McGregor agreed provided the event was open to all Sunday Schools in the area. Sept. 1872 saw 4,000 people congregate at the peak for the revival.

Rev. Adams asked McGregor if the peak had been named. McGregor indicated it had not suggesting the Reverend name the Peak. The Reverend suggested "Mount McGregor" which was enthusiastically embraced by all in attendance. The gravel road allowed for stagecoaches and carriages to access the mountain top. Three stage coaches a day ran from Saratoga Springs to Mount McGregor.

Mr. McGregor proceeded to build a small hotel at the peak which would open in 1877 as the "Mountain House". The hotel accommodated 15-20 borders along with throngs of non paying day visitors who came for the afore mentioned reasons and lunch. Mr. McGregor built the kitchen and dining room as a separate building to keep the heat out of the Hotel. The dining room had full glass walls looking over the magnificent vistas. One summer day in 1881 saw the temperature in Saratoga Springs at 90 degrees while the temperature on Mount McGregor was 70 degrees. No A/C or fans in those days. 1881 saw a reported 10,000 people access the peak by stagecoach, carriage, equestrian and by foot. The Mountain House (or McGregor Hotel as it was sometimes called) was profitable although not reaching McGregor's vision. McGregor ran the seasonal Mountain House from 1877 thru 1882 with his brother-in-law James Sprott. McGregor saw the need for better transportation to his resort. McGregor envisioned a railroad from Saratoga and began a survey of the route in 1880.

McGregor invited a group of investors to the mountain top in the fall of 1881. The investors led by W.J. Arkell saw potential in a resort, leasing the property for 12 years for \$25,000 cash and \$25,000 stock to McGregor in Jan. 1882. Their business plan was to provide access to well known "Adirondack air" closer than an arduous trip to the Adirondack resorts while making use of Saratoga Springs' attractions as a tourist destination. The first order of business was to improve transportation to the Mountain. Starting in March of 1882 they built an eleven mile "narrow gauge" railroad from the Waverly Hotel in Saratoga Springs to the top of the mountain. John McGee, world-renowned railroad engineer, was the chief engineer. The route thru the lower plains was about 7 miles of mostly flat terrain. However the rise to the summit had to be accomplished at a slope of no more than 212 feet per mile making that part of the trip 4 miles. Two steam engines (named "Duncan McGregor" and "George West") and 6 passenger coaches (named "Western Lookout, Eastern Lookout, Sarahka, Lake Bonito, Lake Anna, and Allanadale) were specially built for the railroad. Construction was completed in July of 1882 (4 months) with the first train running on July 17, 1882. The first 3-car train ran in August of 1882 proving very popular, shortening the one-way trip from Saratoga to only 40 minutes

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Mt. McGregor train

## Mt. McGregor

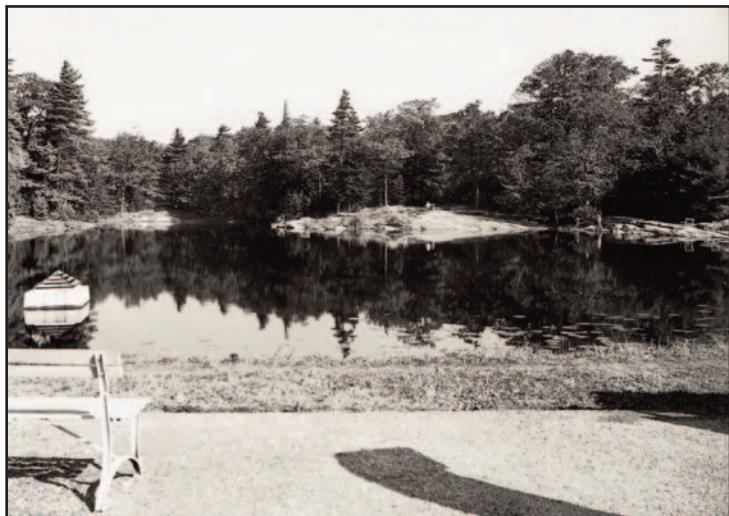
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at a cost of \$1.00 round trip. Three trains a day in each direction ran on the original schedule.

The investment group then embarked on building a world class luxurious Hotel designed to take advantage of spectacular views while in the cool pure clean mountain air. They bought out McGregor and added Joseph W. Drexel to the group. Drexel bought the Mountain House for his summer home moving it 300 feet to make room for a hotel to welcome 300 guests. The kitchen/dining room building was removed with the intention that all meals for the cottage would be provided by the Hotel. The Hotel Balmoral opened to great fanfare in 1883.

June 16, 1885 saw the arrival of former President Ulysses S. Grant at the Drexel Cottage. President Grant was gravely sick and at the urging of his doctor agreed to accept the invitation of Joseph Drexel to use his summer cottage to take advantage of the pure clean air. President Grant completed his memoirs at the cottage assisted by his publisher Mark Twain. President Grant died at the cottage on July 23, 1885. Mr. Drexel directed the cottage never again be inhabited with the exception of a caretaker. The cottage would become known as Grants Cottage and is open seasonally for tours to this day. The story of Grants stay and Grants Cottage is well documented in other literature for those interested.

The Hotel Balmoral was luxurious with its wide verandas accessing the spectacular views of Mt. Marcy and the Adirondacks to the North, Green and White Mountains and Schuylerville to the East and Saratoga and Catskill Mountains to the South. The hotel had electric lights powered by an onsite generator for common areas and gas lights for the guest rooms. Interestingly the generator proved so noisy it was turned off in the evening so not to disturb the sleeping guests. Water was obtained from an onsite 100 ft. artesian well. Numerous trails were cut thru the forest including two the two natural lakes – Lake Bonita and Lake Anna. Artist Lake was nearby. The lakes



Mt. McGregor artist's lake

were stocked for fishing. The Eastern and Northern look-outs were popular destinations for hikers.

Unfortunately, the Hotel was not the huge success investors had envisioned. The hotel was seasonal staying open into October and closed for the winter. The Hotel burned to the ground Dec 17, 1897. Although there was talk of rebuilding the site remained undeveloped. The railroad ceased operation and was dismantled around 1900.

The Mountain top remained dormant until the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company expressed interest at the urging of Senator Edgar T. Bracket of Saratoga Springs. Metropolitan Life was looking for a Sanatorium location to serve their employees infected with tuberculosis. Tuberculosis – the “White Plague” – was a leading cause of death in the early 1900’s. Sanatoriums were established to segregate those infected and provide treatment which included teaching those “cured” to take care of themselves on discharge to prevent others from being infected. Treatment was totally free. Metropolitan Life bought the property in Dec. 1910 with ambitious construction starting June 26, 1911. The first patients were received Nov. 25, 1913 with the facility dedicated on June 13, 1914 with 73 patients in residence. The first buildings upon opening were the patient residences (wards 1&2), infirmary, refectory, nurse’s cottage, icehouse, superintendents house, power house and pump house at Lake Bonita with water piped to the campus water tower in 1912. A U.S. Post Office was established on site in 1914 in the refectory.

The refectory also housed a large patient dining room with magnificent southerly views, staff dining room, kitchen, grocery, butcher shop, bakery, commissary, housekeeping offices, staff residences and storage. By 1916 four additional patient wards along with the 250 seat chapel, administration building and other buildings were added increasing patient capacity to 230. Additional staff residences, research laboratory (1924), auditorium, rest house (1936) and other buildings expanded the facility over the years. Interestingly buildings were constructed

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Mt. McGregor overall view

## Mt. McGregor

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on the South slope of the mountain to take advantage of the southern breeze and sunlight to facilitate recovery of the patients. Patient ward bedrooms were open air covered by a roof. A 417 acre fully operational and equipped farm (1916) in the valley provided fresh milk, eggs, vegetables, poultry, beef and pork to the Mountains occupants. Neil J. Parker served as the farms manager from April 1920 until its closing April 1, 1960. The farm won many agricultural awards for its prize Ayrshire dairy herd and pigs. Parker also played a key role in Boy Scouts both in Wilton and Saratoga County from 1928 into the 1950's.

The Metropolitan Life Sanatorium remained active until its closing Sept. 1, 1945. The sanatorium treated about 3,500 patients over its history. Governor Dewey proposed The State of New York purchase the property Aug. 25, 1945 for \$400,000. Governor Thomas Dewey dedicated the New York State Veterans Rest Camp on Nov 11, 1945. Patients came to the camp, all expenses paid, upon recommendation of their doctor and with approval of the Veterans Agency for a maximum 90 day rest (average stay 45 days) per year. Patients had to be ambulatory and not alcoholics. The Rest Camp accommodated 580 men and 30 women vets from June – September and 380 men and 30 women from October – June due to 4 wards not being heated. Originally intended to serve only WWII vets the Camp ultimately served Vets from all foreign wars/conflicts including the Civil War. The Rest Camp would remain open into 1960 with the last facility service – US Post Office – closed on July 31, 1960. Over 35,000 veterans were served over fifteen years. Governor Nelson Rockefeller proposed closing the Veterans Rest Camp, recommending the site could better be used as an Annex for the overcrowded Rome State School. Mount McGregor's location would also allow easier access for families in the Capital District to visit their resident relatives. The School opened Dec 1, 1960.

The Annex served about 340 patients aged 3 – 70 on the summit of Mt. McGregor. A "Grandparents" program was established allowing local Senior (55+) volunteers to visit the patients offering emotional support and men-

toring. The purpose of the School was to "train patients, if possible, to return to community life" per William L. Foley Steward of the School and past business manager of the Veterans Rest Camp. Many employees of the Rest Camp continued working at the Annex to the Rome State School.

Plans were almost immediately put into action

to construct a new facility on the site of the old farm in the valley with an occupancy designed for 1,180 patients. The site at the bottom of the Mountain would be called the Wilton Developmental Center. George L. Hubbard started work for the Metropolitan Life Sanatorium in 1921 eventually becoming the Business Director then continuing as Superintendent during the entire Veterans Rest Camp era and into the Rome State School Annex era



Mt. McGregor chapel

retiring April 1, 1963.

The Mountain site was turned over to the New York State Corrections Department which opened a minimum security prison in 1976. A medium security prison would be added in the early 1980's. A volunteer program allowed local citizens to visit the prison to help prisoners with transitional services. Work crews from the prison under the supervision of Correction Officers provided services to local non profits such as churches and the Boy Scout Camp Saratoga. Substantial construction, including removal of some of the original buildings, occurred under the Corrections Department. The minimum security prison closed in 2010 with the closure of the medium security prison in 2014 2013. 750 acres of forest land including Lake Bonita and Lake Anna were turned over to the New York Department of Parks and Recreation to become part of the Moreau State Park in 2016. New access trails have been developed including to Lake Bonita and Lake Ann. The site of the buildings and the buildings themselves are currently for sale by New York State although active solicitation has been suspended.

The Mountain has served many functions over the last 200 years and holds many memories, Grant's cottage remains, but what else will the future bring?