



Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186
September—October 2020 • Vol. 24 No. 5



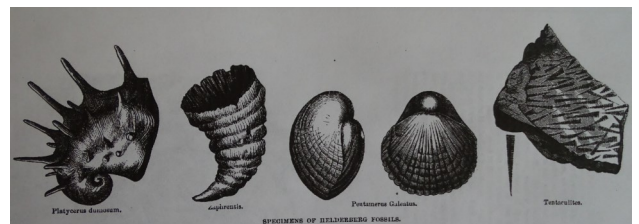
“ THE HELDERBERGS ” 1869 *Journal and Sketches by Verplanck Colvin*

“ Their Geographical name exists only in Albany County , but Geologically, they’re over three hundred miles in length, their unbroken strata reaching from the Hudson to Niagara, and on into Canada ” - VC

Verplanck Colvin (VC) – is best known for his surveys of the Adirondack wilderness - from 1872 to 1900. But in 1869 he did an extensive study of the Helderberg escarpment in Albany County. Colvin (age 22) then had his journal and sketches published in a sixteen page article in the October 1869 issue of *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* titled simply “ THE HELDERBERGS.” Colvin studied and wrote about the escarpment’s cliffs, caves, waterfalls, flora, fauna, geology, extensive fossil record and local history (the Indian Ladder; Tory Cave; Anti-Rent wars; and the meaning of “Helderberg” - “Helle-Burg” or “Clear Mountains”). Colvin took the Susquehanna Railroad from Albany to the Guilderland Station (Meadowdale) and then rode in a horse & wagon to the base of Indian Ladder Road. Then, on foot – he ascended the steep slopes and explored the areas beneath the cliffs and waterfalls. He brought along only sketch pads, maps, notebooks, a compass, and measuring tape. The following is a summary of his studies, with some quotes and sketches from his 1869 article in Harper’s Magazine.



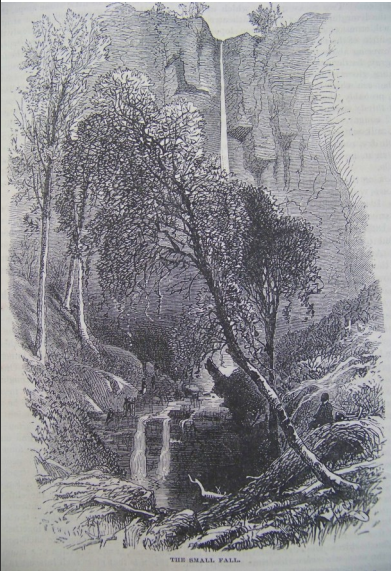
Colvin noted that there were three principal mountain chains in New York State. The granite-peaked Adirondacks to the north; the sandstone/shale covered Catskill Mountains to the south; and the HELDERBERGS in between. *“They are a long angular range of solid blue limestone cliffs, running nearly east and west.” “ Their greatest altitude is one thousand two hundred feet.” (VC). From below the cliffs Colvin writes: “Towering above the uppermost tree-tops, are the gray battlement-like cliffs. Many a dark opening, gloomy recess, and inaccessible ledge can be seen – which human foot has never trod, once, probably, the pathway and home of that blood-thirsty savage - the nimble, and stealthy - footed cougar...Upward, then - no longer over fallen rocks merely, but over prostrate cliffs rather. Huge blocks as large as little cottages - or backwoods log cabins – are heaped in wild confusion...”*



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Regarding the fossil record, Colvin noted that geologists as far away as the western states to Tennessee and to a professor in England - when seeing, or studying fossil shells - mention the name "Helderberg!" *"Below, and on the cliffs above, this (water) fall is one of the best localities for Helderberg fossils, or petrifications. Among these fossil shells of ancient seas - are many peculiar to the Helderbergs. The names and features of these shells - once mastered - two of the most important of geological ages are known to you - the Silurian and Devonian."*



Colvin then ascended to the cliff top, and went to the brink of the Mine Lot Falls. *"The cliff - measured by cord and plummet - is here about one hundred and twenty-six feet in height; that of the waterfall may be estimated at one hundred and sixteen feet....It is grand - thus reclining on the cliff brink, to view the wide-spread landscape to the north - of the mountains, and the joint basin of the Hudson and Mohawk - a deep valley more than sixty miles in width."*

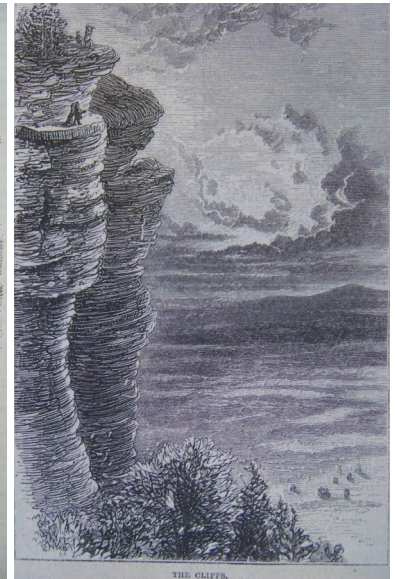
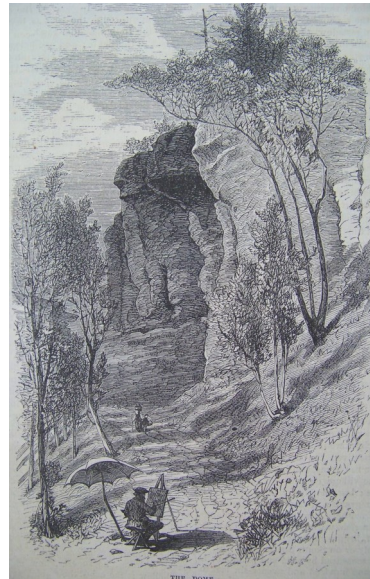
Colvin then descended the Indian Ladder Road a bit, ventured west and visited the "Tory House" (Cave). There, in 1777, Jacob Salisbury - a British Loyalist, and spy - found refuge while burning and looting the lands and farms below. Colvin gives a fanciful, and dramatic account of Salisbury's capture at the cave: *"There is a muttering sound of voices in the impenetrable darkness with-out; an ominous clicking as of many rifle locks, and suddenly someone cries out, 'Jacob Salisbury - lay down your arms! You are surrounded, and can not escape! A dozen rifles are leveled at your breast.' "* (- VC). Salisbury was captured, and met his demise as being a traitor to the Colonials' Independence cause.



Colvin also visited (and sketched) the nearby Clarksville Caves - for his report and visited other caves along the escarpment, including: *"Westward, among the cliffs, above the village of Knowersville, is Livingston's Cave, a small, dry, and romantic cavern."* (-VC).

Colvin honed his ability to create accurate and detailed sketches on this expedition. This became useful in his twenty-seven illustrated "Annual Reports to the New York State Legislature" - over the span of his twenty-eight year survey of the Adirondack Wilderness!

- by Jim Schaller



Friends of Thacher Park Meeting Dates for 2020

Socially distanced board meetings are scheduled for September 9, and November 11, 7:00pm at Thacher Visitor Center. *Please stay tuned for updates due to Covid-19.*



Fall is For Planting!

Welcome in beautiful, cool weather.....
gorgeous Fall Foliage....
by.....

Planting Natives!

Thacher Nature Center has many beautiful native
perennials available at sale prices!

Fill in those gaps, replace that dead exotic that just
couldn't deal with all the heat and drought of summer...

Support Pollinators! Plant for Birds, Bees!

Increase Biodiversity!

Quarts available: \$4.00 each!

(Our lowest price ever!)

All purchases are accompanied by species-specific growing information.

Thacher Nature Center is open Tues. - Sunday, 9am-4pm.

518-872-0800

Nature Center Updates

Thacher Nature Center is open and welcoming
visitors Tuesday through Sunday, 9am - 4pm.
Visitors are required to wear masks inside the
building. We have removed touchable items but in
addition to displays we have our live turtles, a
snake, and a very busy honeybee hive to entertain
visitors. Our Native Plant Sale is ongoing, and we
still have a nice selection of perennials and shrubs
at sale prices. We are also offering a limited number
of programs and advertising those on Face-
book.com/ThacherPark. Call the Nature Center at
518-872-0800 for more information.

Thank You, Nancy Engel!

On behalf of the Board and Membership of the Friends of Thacher State Park, I'd like to congratulate Nancy upon her retirement. Nancy has been the Director of the Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center for many years and has been responsible for establishing most of the programs at the Nature Center. If you've ever been to one of the Nature Center's winter talks or educational programs, have ever participated in a nature walk or geology hike through the park, you have Nancy to thank for organizing many of these events.

Nancy has been very helpful to the Board and to me with her advice and guidance about park programs and her connections with resources in our community. Nancy has been there with a helping hand every step of the way.

This is truly bittersweet since we're losing a wonderful part of the fabric of Thacher Park while we wish Nancy a long, happy retirement! We will miss you, Nancy! Thank you for all you've done for Thacher and for the Friends over the years!

- by John Kilroy

Check for updates at www.friendsofthacherpark.org

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Vice President:	Laure-Jeanne Davignon	(518) 578-4718
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Secretary:	Christine Gervasi	(518) 872-1501
	Immediate former President: Sigrin Newell	

As always, call (518) 872-0800 or (518) 872-1237 to verify activity times and dates.

Please feel free to call board members with questions or suggestions.

Many thanks to Jim Schaller, Laurel Tormey-Cole, Nancy Engel, John Kilroy and Victoria Gellatly for their contributions to this newsletter.

Other Trustees

Jim Schaller	(518) 861-7452	Ethan Willsie	(518) 588-4148
Chuck Ver Straeten	(518) 872-2223	Brian Horl	(518) 872-1383
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Want to contribute? Please email me at cgersvasi@albany.edu. Christine Gervasi—Editor

**Friends of Thacher Park
c/o Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center
87 Nature Center Way
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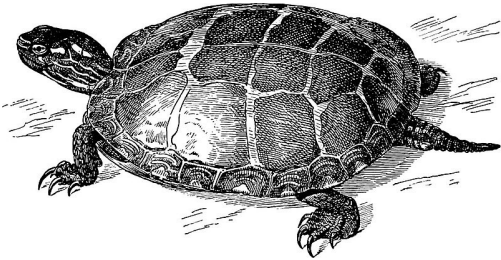


Image credit Edward Knobel

Wednesday, September 9, 2020

Next:

Board Meeting

7:00 pm at Thacher Visitor Center (on the Patio outside - please bring a face mask)



Turtle Tales

The painted turtle, *Chrysemys picta*, is the most broadly distributed turtle species in North America, ranging north-south from Canada to northern

Mexico, and east-west across the entirety of the continental United States. Here in the Capital district, the Eastern subspecies can be observed in habitats with permanent water, such as ponds, lakes, and slow-moving creeks. They are easily identified by their smooth, dark carapace (top shell), yellow plastron (bottom shell), and the red and yellow striping patterns along their legs and neck.

While they spend a majority of their time in the water or basking on submerged logs, males and females alike are most active terrestrially between April and September, when the temperatures are warmest in the northern hemisphere. Mating and nesting seasons typically

take place in the springtime, leaving most eggs to hatch towards the end of summer. It is not uncommon to find painted turtles on roads or trails near ponds as they travel to and from their nests.

Unlike most animals, where sex is determined by chromosomes, many turtles (and other reptiles like crocodiles) undergo temperature-dependent sex determination. In the case of the Eastern painted turtle, consistently shifting egg incubation temperature by about 4°C can lead to nests of entirely male or entirely female offspring, rather than a mix of both. Sometimes this effect can be counteracted by laying eggs a few weeks earlier or later in the year, but it does not always have a large enough impact. Due to increasing global temperatures, higher numbers of female hatchlings have been observed in recent years compared to males.

Regardless of the weather, painted turtles occasionally make an appearance on solid ground, deciding to cross hiking trails or other trafficked pedestrian areas near ponds and creeks. If you are lucky enough to see one, don't hesitate to take a minute or two and watch as they amble along towards their next destination.

- by Victoria Gellatly

As always, you can find a color version of the newsletter at www.friendsofthacherpark.org