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The Parla Foster House: A Brief History

Posted on [May 25, 2020](#) by [hillsdalehistorians](#)



At the corner of Rts. 22 and 23 sits an imposing brick house built circa 1783-1790 by a man named Parla Foster.

Although the house is listed in the [Historic Hillsdale Resource Survey](#) as being in the Federal style, it does not exhibit strong Federal characteristics. David Gallagher, a local decorative arts expert and amateur architectural historian, considers the house to be a classic example of the Georgian style, noting “The Palladian windows are typical Georgian features, seen in many Columbia County grand homes such as the Ludlow house in Claverack, 1786, and other houses including frame examples.”



Parla Foster (1759-1852) was born in Connecticut and served as a private in “Colonel Ashley’s Berkshire (MA) Regiment” during the Revolutionary War. At some point, either before or just after the Revolutionary War, he made his way to Hillsdale, in the disputed border lands between Massachusetts and New York, when the town was still commonly known as Nobletown. He purchased land in the hamlet of Hillsdale from the Van Rensselaers after Massachusetts yielded to New York all claims for the contested land. Foster built the house as both a family residence and inn, and it served as a coach stop along the Columbia Turnpike (1799). Its barred basement was sometimes used to quarter prisoners on their way to the county jail in Claverack. Foster was also a lay preacher: in 1811 he donated land and financed the construction of Hillsdale’s first Methodist church, which stood just behind the house. The church was lost to fire but its adjacent cemetery is still there, today known alternately as the Pill Hill Cemetery, Methodist Cemetery or the Parla Foster Cemetery. Foster is buried there, as are many of his descendants.



Foster and his wife Phebe Wills, also of CT, had 12 children: Talcott, Anna, Moses, Isaac, Simeon, Ely, Seymour, Judson, Deidamie, Sally, Katy and Phebe. The property included tenant houses and barns, which can be seen on this [map](#) of the Hillsdale Hamlet Historic District, and remained in the Foster family for about 100 years. It passed from Parla to his son Seymour, then to Seymour's son Will. In the 1880s, Will sold the property, then known as Elm Park Farm, to Mr. and Mrs. Asher Adams of Massachusetts.

In 1897, the Adams sold the farm to Rensselaer Tenbroeck. Tenbroeck was identified in one newspaper article as a "railroad man." In fact, he served for more than 20 years as the General Eastern Agent of the Union Pacific Railroad. Students of Capital Region history will recognize both his first and last names and know that Mr. Tenbroeck came from a quite prominent family in New York State. Mr. Tenbroeck remodeled the Foster house, and it is said that he planned to install four bathrooms to serve the house's 17 rooms. evidently, that never happened.

Rensselaer Tenbroeck died in 1918. In 1921, his heirs sold the house to Charles and Myrtle Mallery. The Mallerys sold off most of Elm Park Farm, and opened the Elmwood Inn, which was operated by several different owners until 1968. Interestingly, the 1940 census lists Charles as the building superintendent of the Roe Jan school; Myrtle was listed as a "hotel operator." An operator indeed! Myrtle energetically worked many

angles to supplement the family income. In the summer of 1932 she rented space to the New York State Police for a trooper station. (The troopers installed a teletype machine to stay in touch with the Albany and Stockport stations.) And in 1942, when real estate salesman Donald Mitchell was looking to expand from his Spencertown office to Hillsdale, Myrtle became Mr. Mitchell's Hillsdale representative, operating out of the inn. In 1932, there were so many new teachers arriving to work at the brand new Roeliff Jansen Central School that 15 of them were boarded at the Elmwood Inn until housing could be built for them.

On June 16, 1927, the Mallery's daughter Marianna Van Rensselaer Mallery was married at the inn. It was a low-key affair, followed by a light supper at the Wayfarer's Shop, which had opened in 1924 on Route 23 to serve motorists passing through town.

The Mallerys sold the Elmwood Inn to Mr. and Mrs. Walter Weber of Raleigh, NC in 1947. The Webers operated the inn until selling to William Murphy (exact year unknown). In turn, Mr. Murphy sold it to Mr. and Mrs. Richard Studhalter in 1958.



The Elmwood Inn in undated photos.





The kitchen of the Elmwood Inn



The kitchen at the Elmwood Inn



The dining room at the Elmwood Inn

The Studhalters ran the inn until they sold it to Sara Lehrhaupt in 1963. According to news coverage at the time, Ms. Lehrhaupt had already had a career in hospitality, having owned a large hotel in Asbury Park, NJ. She was also a noted designer of ceramic jewelry and planned to open a studio at the inn and teach classes in ceramic jewelry making. She imagined her primary lodgers would be skiers at Catamount. She also pledged to install four more bathrooms in the house.



The Elmwood, Hillsdale, N. Y.

Ms. Lehrhaupt also brought another “first” to Hillsdale: its first ever Flea Market. It spanned two weekends in 1965 and attracted more than 50 dealers, who displayed their wares on “the gracious grounds of the Elmwood Inn,” according a news account. The event was repeated in 1966.

In 1968, Ms. Lehrhaupt sold the building to a restaurateur named Wesley Hall, and that was the end of the Elmwood Inn. Mr. Hall opened the Dutch Hearth Inn, which he sold to Chef Jean Morel in 1971. Morel was born in France in 1933 and served in the French army. He emigrated to the US in 1961. When he purchased the Dutch Hearth Inn, he and his wife, Madeleine, moved into the small cottage behind the inn. They operated the Dutch Hearth until 1976, when they rechristened it L’Hostellerie Bressane, which they ran until retiring in 1995.



Chef Jean Morel

The Morels sold the restaurant to Chef David Lawson, who renamed it Aubergine. Chef Lawson was a gifted chef with an impressive resume and there was much wailing and gnashing of teeth when he decided to close Aubergine in 2006.



Mr. Lawson sold to property to “Nobletown Corners, Ltd.” That turned out to be the Herrington family. In 2016 Carrie Herrington opened her exquisite interior design store, [C. Herrington Home + Design](#) in the old house.

So that’s a quick overview of the 230+ year history of the Parla Foster house. The Historians of Hillsdale have used whatever resources were available to us to research this post. Sadly, due to the coronavirus shutdown, we cannot gain access to the deeds at the county clerk’s office, which could help clear up the house’s ownership during the period from 1947 to 1958. And it would be interesting to know how many acres in Hillsdale Parla Foster owned. Some references state that Foster and Refine Latting, between them, owned most of the property in the hamlet at one time. We know that as late as 1836 Parla donated land for a parsonage “at the corner of South” (now Maple) “and Cold Water Streets,” and that in 1845 Parla’s son Seymour donated the land that the present First Methodist Church is built on.

Looking for Lattings: Part II

Posted on [May 29, 2022](#) by [hillsdalehistorians](#)

Curiosity about Refine Latting, Hillsdale's first tanner, caused us to tumble down a research rabbit hole into the history of the Latting family, which you can read about in our [April 2022 post](#). We traced the Latting family emigration first from Flanders, then from England to what became Lattingtown near Oyster Bay, Long Island. The great-great-great-grandson of original immigrant Richard Lettin was Ambrose Latting (1750-1800), who settled in Hillsdale, raising a family west of the village near today's Craryville Road.

Like his ancestor, Richard Lettin, Ambrose was intent on property acquisition. In 1782, when New York abolished the feudal inheritance system of entail that dealt a fatal blow to the vast estates of the Van Rensselaers and the Livingstons, Ambrose acquired property in Hillsdale at a rapid clip. When we first became Hillsdale Historians, we were given a box full of deeds and indentures, some dating back to that time, showing many of Ambrose's land deals. The documents are very fragile and in need of conservation, but from the ones we can read he was the Richard Lettin of his day. We intend to donate the documents to the Columbia County Historical Society in the hope that they can be restored.



1873 Hillsdale home of Ambrose and Joanna (Morehouse) Latting, occupied by their descendants until sold by Richard Rossman Lawrence in 1960.

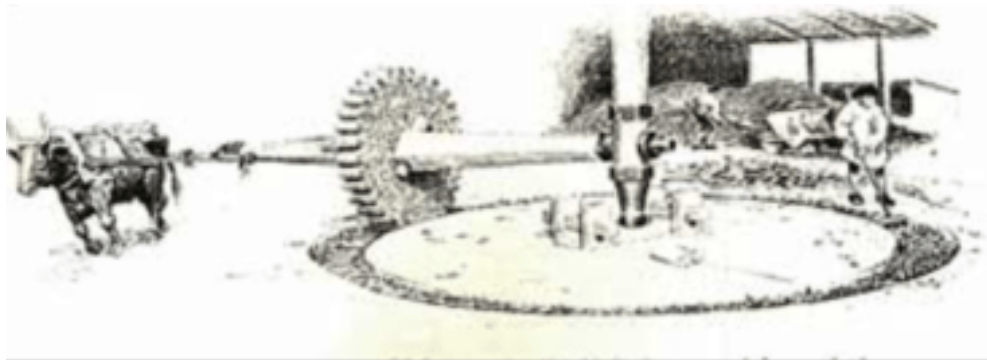
Researching family histories — which we don't often do — can turn up some juicy scandals. Ambrose Latting's widow, Joanna (Morehouse) Latting (1756-1849), in 1801 became the fourth wife of Reverend Stephen Gano, founder of two Baptist Churches in Hillsdale. They separated permanently in 1803 when she accused him of being a worshiper of the Devil because he was a Free Mason. The Real Housewives of Hillsdale, indeed!

But back to our story. Ambrose and Joanna's second son, Refine Latting, was the third of their eight children and was born in 1784. He is the Latting we remember today as a man of great enterprise who once owned half of the hamlet.

A note about the name "Refine." Puritans, from whom the Lettins/Lattins/Lattings were descended, saw common names as too worldly, and sometimes opted instead to name children after virtues or with religious slogans as a way of setting their community apart from non-Puritan neighbors. This led to some lovely names like Felicity, Patience and Hope, and some truly bizarre [names](#) like Kill-Sin, Humiliation, and Handmaid (a woman's name, naturally).

When Refine was not yet 20, Hudson investors in 1799 organized a turnpike company to improve the road to Sheffield MA, along what is today Route 23. Hillsdale hamlet was probably the chief beneficiary of the creation of the Columbia Turnpike, one of the first in the county (Hillsdale hamlet itself was known for many years as "Turnpike"). The movement of large numbers of livestock to market along the Sheffield Road stimulated the tanning industry and Refine Latting, smelling opportunity, established Hillsdale's first tannery just after the turn of the 19th century. It was located to the west of the village. Tanning leather was an essential trade of the day. Leather, usually from cows but also from sheep and goats, was used in a wide variety of products, including shoes, boots, aprons and clothing, as well as for saddles and bridles and ships' rigging. Books were often bound in leather.

Tanning cowhide was a long process, generally taking more than a year. The word tanning is derived from "tannin," a natural substance found in virtually every tree and plant. Concentrations of tannin are particularly strong in the bark of oak trees. Tanners would extract tannic acid from bark they had collected, in some cases using a contraption like the one shown here to crush the bark.



Refine's tannery would likely have used a process described on the website of [Blackstock Leather](#): "First, the animal skins were cleaned and softened with water. Once cleaned, the tanners still had to pound the hides to remove excess fat and flesh. Next, to loosen the hair follicles, they would either coat the hides with an alkaline lime mixture, leave the hides out to putrefy for months, or soak them in vats of urine before removal of the hair with a dull knife (scudding).

"In the bating stage, tanners worked animal dung or brains into the skins either by beating with sticks or kneading them in a vat of feces and water. The combination of bacteria enzymes found in animal waste and the beating or kneading action fermented the skin and made it supple."

It should be noted that as desirable a commodity as leather was (and still is), tanneries did not make good neighbors. Tanneries were most often located on the outskirts of a town or village – generally downwind. According to the website "[Colonial Sense](#)," the smell of decaying animals and manure was very strong. Tanning was "one of the smelliest and [most] physically demanding and dangerous professions a person could have in early America."

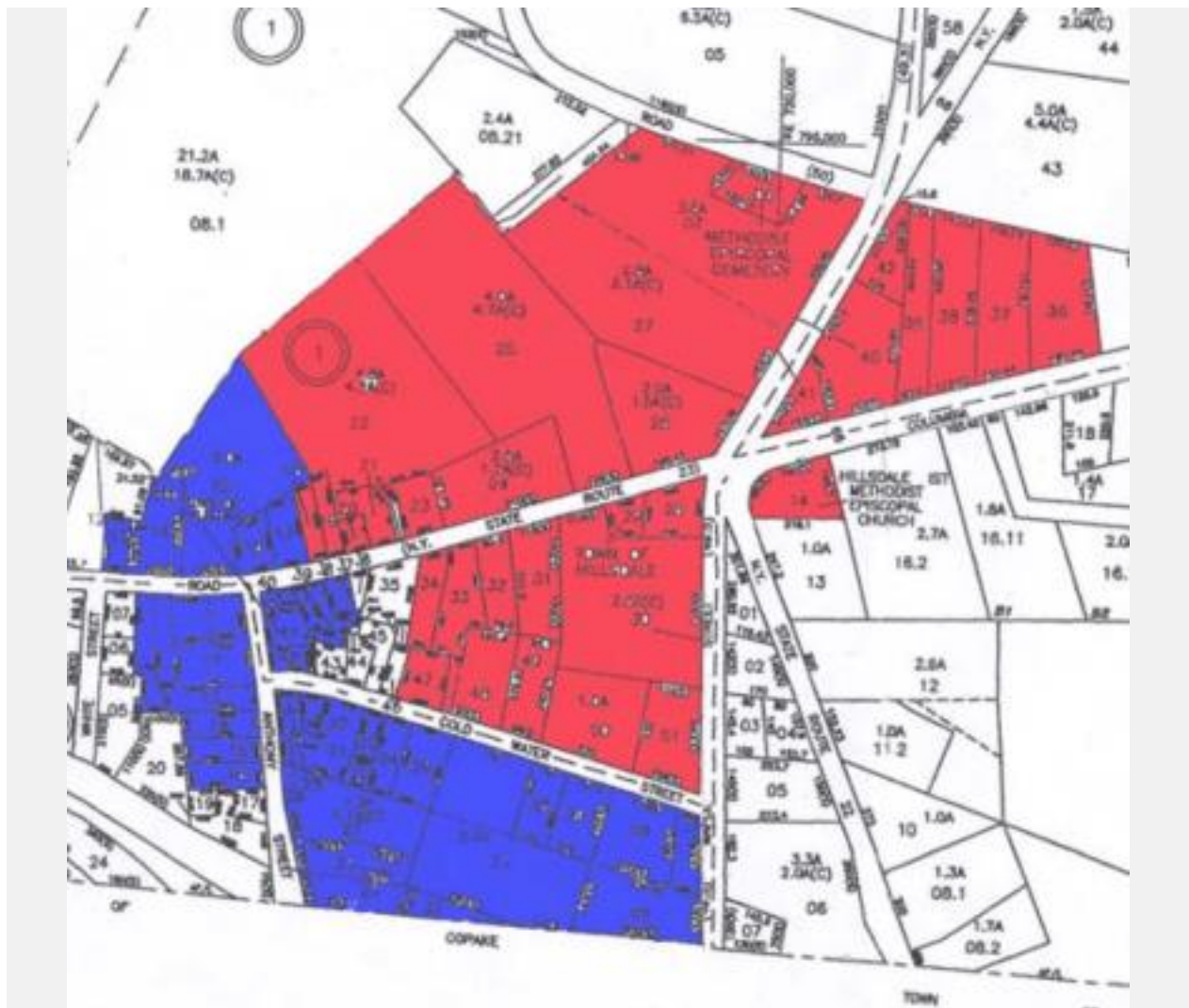


A 1473 French painting of a tanner "scudding" the hide (removing hair). He does not look happy in his work.

In *Looking for Work: Industrial Archeology in Columbia County, New York* (published by the Columbia County Historical Society, 2007), author Peter H. Stott cites the 1820 U.S. Census of Manufacturers as listing the Hillsdale tannery, one of nine in the county, as being assigned to Stephen Hadley.

“The name ‘Hadley’ does not appear in the Columbia County deed books, and we have supposed that Hadley may have leased the property from Latting, by that time a successful innkeeper and one of the town’s first postmasters.”

Refine’s profession in the U.S. Census from 1840 through 1870 is listed as “farmer.” A Columbia County business directory published in 1862 also listed him as a tanner. And tanning must have been profitable. Like his father, Refine invested in real estate and as the map below shows, at one time Refine and fellow Hillsdale resident Parla Foster owned virtually all of today’s Hillsdale hamlet.



Refine Latting owned the property in blue; Parla Foster owned the property in red. Between the two, they owned virtually all of Hillsdale hamlet.

Refine's first wife was Catharine Rossman (1781-1812). They had four children together before Catharine's death. One year later Refine married Anna Esmond Truesdell (1787-1869). Anna was a widow: her first husband, John Truesdell, died in 1806 in his early 20's leaving Anna with one son, John Truesdell, Jr. Refine and Anna had six children, only one of whom, Henrietta, lived to adulthood. From the Latting Family Bible:

Marriage July 4, 1813.		
Refine Latting	Entered (July 12, 1783)	Deaths
Anna Latting	Oct. 13, 1787	May 1873.
daughter of Isaih Esmond		Oct. 15, 1869.
<u>Children</u>		
Beebe Latting	Nov. 27, 1814	Feb. 22, 1818.
Andrew Latting	Mar. 9, 1817	Apr. 25, 1818.
Infant Twins	Oct. 30, 1818	Oct. 30, 1818
Infant	Aug. 30	Aug. 30
Henriette Latting	Apr. 29, 1830.	

Before the advent of modern medicine, one in four children did not survive to the age of five. Refine and Anna lost five children before daughter Henrietta was born in 1830.

Henrietta Latting was born in 1830, when Anna was 43. Refine was a respected citizen and "kept the first post office, about a half-mile west of Hillsdale" hamlet, according to Ellis' *History of Columbia County, New York*. At that time, mail was delivered to Hillsdale via the Hudson and Hartford stages.

In 1814, Refine built the Latting Tavern, still standing and known today as The Hillsdale House. The tavern became a stagecoach stop on the Columbia Turnpike. With the exception of a few recent years, the Latting Tavern/Hillsdale House has been in continuous operation since 1814. If you look at the eastern gable end of the building, you can see the contours of the original tavern, which was enlarged over the years.



East end of the Hillsdale House. The vestiges of the original (brick) R. Latting Tavern are still visible.

We found a reference to the original Latting Tavern sign, which in the 1950s made its way to an antique dealer in Kingston and was eventually sold to an unknown collector.

Henrietta Latting was born in 1830 and married Owen Bixby in 1852. Both are buried in the Hillsdale Rural Cemetery on County Route 22. Interestingly, Refine's wife Anna, who died four years before him, is not buried with him in the West Hillsdale Baptist Cemetery plot but rather in the Methodist Church/Foster Cemetery on Pill Hill, alongside her parents and son, John Truesdell Jr.

Latting died in 1873 at age 89 and was the last of the Lattings to be buried in the West Hillsdale Baptist Cemetery, a well maintained graveyard on Craryville Road. On a lovely spring day it's worth a visit to pay tribute to an early and enterprising Hillsdale businessman.



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The Polymathic Mrs. Pulver

Posted on September 24, 2020 by [hillsdalehistorians](#)



Ida Haywood Pulver at home in Hillsdale in her mid-nineties.

Over the years, there have been a number of prominent women who have had a large and lasting impact on Hillsdale and Columbia County. One of them was Ida Haywood Pulver, a well-educated (for her time) woman whose many professions — photographic hand-colorist, dressmaker-to-the-stars, Parisian milliner, fundraiser, gardener, historical society founder and overall local mover-and-shaker — kept her busy during her extraordinary 101 year life.

Ida Haywood was born in Copake on March 12, 1864. Abraham Lincoln was president and the end of the War of the Rebellion was still almost a year away. Her father, Norman, was the proprietor of the infamous Black Grocery for more than 20 years. Although the Black Grocery had a reputation for attracting “evil scheming men and ladies of easy virtue,” Ida insisted that by the time her father took over the store, it was just like any other country store, with none of the carousing for which it had been known. (This is probably true. Apparently, a lot of the boisterous customers were Irish railroad construction crews who worked bone-crushing jobs all day and wanted a little relaxation at night. But by 1852, the railroad had moved on past Hillsdale on its way to Chatham Four Corners and the wild behavior went along with it.)



The Black Grocery, likely named for its creosote "paint." The photo shows Norman and Amelia Haywood and daughter Ida..

Ida attended private school at the Hillsdale Classical Institute (more on that in a future post) and found work with a Hudson photographer of some renown, Frank Forshew. Forshew instructed Ida in the techniques of inspecting photographic plates and, eventually, the art of hand coloring photographs.



Frank Forshew

Forshew operated a summer shop in Saratoga Springs and for several years, Ida summered with her aunt in Saratoga so that she could continue developing her skills. In June of 1885, Ida accompanied a Forshew employee named Baker to the Mt. McGregor home where Ulysses S. Grant, 18th president of the United States, was staying with his family. Grant, who was dying of throat cancer, wanted a family photograph. Ida recalled how members of the family carried Grant onto the home's large front porch. Grant was sweating profusely in the summer heat. He died less than a month later.



In 1887, Ida married Dewey Almstead of Copake. Dewey had secured a position at the fashionable St. Denis Hotel in New York City and Dewey and Ida moved to Manhattan.



A postcard showing the St. Denis Hotel at Broadway and 11th Street, New York City, circa 1908.

Sadly, Dewey passed away a few years later, when he was in his mid-thirties. To make ends meet, Ida opened a dressmaking shop in her East 48th Street home. She ran the shop for 12 years, eventually employing some eight women, and was said to have had an “A-List” clientele. Along the way, she became an agent for a French millinery company and spent six months living in Paris, learning about French fashion and buying cotton fabrics to bring home.

It’s not clear why, but Ida returned to the Roe Jan area sometime during the first decade of the 20th century. She settled in Hillsdale and in 1917, she became the second wife of Freeland Pulver. Freeland was a very successful merchant and ran a store in what today is the Roe Jan Brewing Company. (Read about Freeland and the brewery [here](#).)

While Freeland toiled away at his shop, Ida soon became one of Hillsdale’s most prominent movers and shakers. She founded and served as the first president of the Hillsdale Garden Club and organized the first of many annual flower shows. (Fans of ***Downton Abbey*** will appreciate that, like Violet Crawley, Ida almost always took first prize for her entries.)



“The Furness trophy, a lustre bowl, went to Mrs. Freeland Pulver for winning the largest number of firsts in home shows for the year.”

Ida also had a passion for local history. In addition to founding the Hillsdale Historical Society, she was a board member of the Daughters of Columbia County Historical Society, later to be known as the Columbia County Historical Society (CCHS). She frequently participated in events and fundraisers to raise money to establish the “House of History” in the Vanderpoel House in Kinderhook. It’s now owned by the CCHS.



The Vanderpoel House in Kinderhook, a/k/a “the House of History.” It is owned by the Columbia County Historical Society.

Freeland died in 1939, and Ida devoted the rest of her life to gardening and beautifying her home at 25 Anthony Street. She also organized choral recitals and other events to raise money to improve Hillsdale, such as planting trees and shrubs in the park across from the Methodist Church.

In 1942, Ida began spending the winter with friends in Delray Beach, FL. In 1954, on her 90th birthday, Ida took her first airplane trip to Florida and then flew several times between New York and Florida until her last trip in 1958.



Ida remained in Hillsdale until 1963, when she moved to Canandaigua, NY to be near her daughter-in-law, Louise Leonard. Ida Pulver passed away in Canandaigua on March 14, 1965, just two days after her 101st birthday. She was active and alert until just a few days before her death. She is buried in the Hillsdale Rural Cemetery.



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