

## Lexington Hotel and Lexington House

by Elaine Warfield

The Monroe (Munroe) House, (later called the Lexington Hotel) was built around 1878-9 by James Monroe and John P. VanValkenburgh. (They may have been cousins). The architectural style was Italiante, a three-story hotel

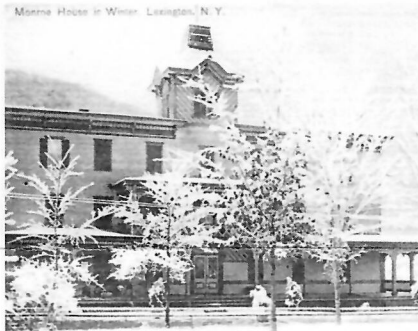
accommodating 50 people as summer guests. It boasted a first class "City Bar, Bowling Alley and Billiard Hall."

James Monroe Van Valkenburgh (1842-1912), prominent citizen and longtime Lexington resident, was a veteran of the Civil War. He served in the 80th New York Volunteers and was badly wounded at the second battle of Bull Run, August 30, 1862 while attempting to assist Colonel George Watson Pratt, who had been mortally wounded, off the field.

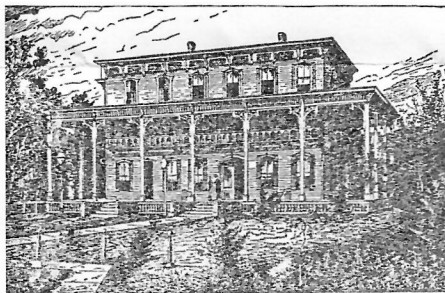
He later served as Lexington town supervisor and superintendent of highways.

After a disagreement, John, also of Civil War note, decided in 1883 to build his own boarding house across the creek from the Hotel, and called it the Lexington House. The latter is located on State Route 42 and can be seen on the right as you drive across the Lexington Bridge which spans the Schoharie Creek. It was designed by local architect Jerome Campbell in a vernacular style once common to the Catskills.

It was built as a large three story frame building in an "L" shape and was deemed a middle class resort. All floors included the gas lighting of the times and complete firestop construction of the balloon framing. It had elements of Italianate and Eastlake design. In later years additional acreage was added to the property, some of which is across State Route 42. At one point



### LEXINGTON HOUSE.



IN THE HEART OF THE CATSKILLS.

there was an ice house (1900), wagon house (1883) and a River Theater (1900) which was one of the first long span truss constructions for the region.

The Lexington House was one of the last examples of late 19th century resort architecture in the Catskill Region. In 1995, with few structural changes since it was built, it was listed on the **National Register of Historic Places**.

The boarding house business experienced substantial expansion after the Civil War, and both Hotel and House were well known stops for boarders.

In its later years the Lexington House became a summer camp and then an art center. Author, director and playwright Oakley "Tad" Hall, III founded and was artistic director of the Lexington Conservatory Theatre at the Lexington House property. His plays "Grinder's Stand", "Beatrice" (Cenci) and "The Old Man", along with his stage adaptation of "Frankenstein", were first performed at The Barn Theater, a structure across the street.

In 1978, after a promising beginning to his career, Oakley suffered massive head injuries in a fall from the Lexington bridge, spending decades in recovery.



In 1982 Art Awareness bought the property to offer the resort as

a summer home to artists and an exhibition space for their work. In 1987 Art Awareness was awarded an \$85,620 grant from the NYS Department of Park and Recreation to restore the former resort along the creek. One of its



buildings, the Morse Inn (Mackey House in the 1800s), and a barn theater in 2006 were home to EST, The Ensemble Studio Theater, an organization offering theater classes while presenting new artists and their works.

## Advertisement - Lexington House

*"This first class resort is open through the year. The house is new, elegant and commodious in all its appointments, with ample accommodations for Fifty guests. The Rooms spacious and thoroughly ventilated, commanding beautiful views of the surrounding mountains. This resort is located near Crystal Lake, nearly 1,500 feet above the Hudson River."*

**Sources:** *Christine Dwon and Mary Palazzolo, Town Historians, Karen Deeter, History of the Town of Lexington, Elizabeth Hapeman, Art Awareness, The Windham Journal, Sylvia Banks, John Falke, Seward Osborne, RN Reynolds.*

## Town of Jewett Historian

Janet Lawrence Nicholls, born and raised in the Town of Jewett, always had a fascination with the area's beauty and history. An outdoor enthusiast, Janet would often pack up her gear and camp out for a weekend.

She began collecting stories related to the Mountain Top at an early age, and acted as Jewett's Historian for the last 15 years, recently stepping down at age 85. During that time Janet kept a record of all deaths in the Town, and meticulously typed each obituary on archival paper before placing them in albums.

Janet routinely visited the Town's 17 cemeteries, recording names, birth dates and other vital information from gravestones, some dating back to the late 1700s.

At an early age she listened to her father tell stories of the big cats known to roam the mountain top. Fascinated, at about age 12 she began remembering the stories and later compiling first hand accounts. Today Janet has quite an impressive album of big cat sightings.



**South Jewett Sunday School, 1947.** Top row, Janet Lawrence, Fern Hapeman, Mabel Merwin, Betty Hapeman, Doris Hoagland. 2nd from top, Percy and Paul Merwin, 3rd row, Arthur and Robert Lawrence, Marjorie Merwin, unidentified. 4th Row from top, Bobby Hoagland, Lorraine Miles, Nancy Merwin, front row, Irene Hoagland, Vincent Graves.

## Ashland Historical Association

Samerna Rion has been the Ashland Historical Association's historian for 7 years and is also the acting President. She really enjoys digging into the past, building the stories of those who lived there and researching the businesses that made Ashland a prosperous village.



Each year Samerna organizes a history day on a specific topic, and displays Ashland's numerous memorabilia and photo albums.

Her presentation last year concentrated on the College in Ashland, which was originally known as the Hedding Institute. Samerna also has an original letterhead typeset for the college (which was given back to Ashland by the Zadock Pratt Museum).

Anything that supports the Town's history and its people is archived, including baseball/cornet band uniforms and also several postcards and articles.



The Town recently received scrapbooks, newspapers and other memorabilia relating to members of the Sons of Temperance who supported prohibition.

Trinity Episcopal Church was acquired a number of years ago and grants have been applied for, toward restoration. Plans are to share space with local multiple historical associations, such as Windham and Jewett, so items of historical interest can be displayed to the general public.



Restoration plans are nearing completion at West

Settlement Church on County Route 10.

Ashland is very active with fund raisers such as their "All You Can Eat Breakfast" and the "Annual Machinery Show and Tractor/Truck Pull" which is in its 12th year.

*Anyone wishing to research a particular subject about the Town can call for an appointment.*