

October 5, 2009

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: **“Greene County USA”** on Television

Television is about the immediate, the important, the sensational!. Who ever heard of putting the history of a rural county on television? It’s happening - not for want of better things - but because the subject is about one of the biggest little places in America - Greene County, New York - a county whose history has contributed mightily to the history of the nation. It’s happening on WMHT Channel 17 on October 25<sup>th</sup> at 1:00PM and October 30<sup>th</sup> at 10:PM, as part of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of Henry Hudson but it would be a valid subject any day of any year. The producer is Greene County resident Jonathan Donald.

A seemingly sleepy place Greene has been around as an important destination no less than 11,000 years when early man first came there to mine flint for his deadly Mastodon killing spear points. For no evident reason this began a series of events and developments that all together make up an impressive story – a story that seems out of all proportion to the size of the place and how little people know of it. It goes something like this: Henry Hudson went ashore at what would become Catskill and met a friendly Mohican reception. A Mohican wise man or sachem named “Kat” subsequently lent his name to the place and the mountains to the West. We’ll see how the early Dutch settlers of the area were a great deal more worldly and politically sophisticated than their much reported on New England neighbors – the Pilgrims. A fighting clergyman, Jacobus Schuneman, crafted a political declaration that proceeded Jefferson’s famous Declaration of Independence that itself reflected historical Dutch precedents. There was an ugly guerrilla war in Greene during the Revolution with kidnappings and murders. With the arrival of the New Englanders after the Revolution, Greene, like other areas, developed a narrow minded morality that crossed religious denominations and punished many innocents. People also suffered injustices inflicted by a class ridden society but the 19<sup>th</sup> century would redeem all that with extraordinary progress and change.

Catskill became the most important port on the Hudson between New York City and Albany. A host of nationally important entrepreneurs and inventors arose. There was Zadock Pratt who would develop the Catskill Mountains’ first industry, tanning leather, and go on to Washington as a Congressman to propel new ideas like the Smithsonian and a railroad route to the West. Levi Hill, a country preacher from West Kill created the chemical process for color photography and became embroiled in terrible controversy generated by this momentous development. James Bogardus of Catskill put up the world’s first iron building in NYC from which all skyscrapers would evolve. William Bullock invented the high speed press which enabled the production of new national illustrated magazines. Calvin Adams of tiny Oak Hill produced America’s first

malleable iron an early form of steel and a neighbor named Dutcher forged the nation's first unbreakable iron plow.

The first great cultural movement in America - the American Romantic Movement - began in Greene. Painter Thomas Cole laid the foundations of the Hudson River School of Art. James Fennimore Cooper placed his "Last of the Mohicans" in the Greene County Catskills, as did Washington Irving his "Rip Van Winkle"

There were important women from Greene as well. May Ann Willson was one of two women pioneers that came to Greenville in 1810 and, with paints made of natural dyes, began painting biblical and fanciful scenes that she sold to farmers for pennies. She became a nationally recognized water colorist – one of the nation's two earliest. Textile designer Helen Rowe Metcalf of Catskill founded the Rhode Island School of Design and another "designing woman" Candace Wheeler became a partner of William Comfort Tiffany and then established a successful women's business in the decorative arts which provided substantial livelihoods for widows of the Civil War. She then went on to found America's first art colony, the Onteora Club in Tannersville which was a center of cultural events and lavish parties at the end of the century.

The program is rich in music and period entertainment: a Dutch Tavern scene in 1688, a Thomas Cole Musical Evening in 1840, a Jenny Lind concert in 1851 and in the 1880s scenes from the marvelously popular Opera "Rip Van Winkle" acclaimed around the world.

A premiere screening will take place in Catskill October 24<sup>th</sup> at 4:00PM at the Community movie theatre. Tickets are \$5 with a reception to follow.