

The Colonie Historical Oracle

Quarterly Newsletter of the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie

Volume 17, No. 1

Jan-March 2022

A Trans-Atlantic Mystery Sir Walter Scott replica sundial at Hillside, Menands,

Adapted from a previously published article by Martin Jenkins in the
British Sundial Society Bulletin
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Figure 1: Portrait of Sir Walter Scott 1822, National Portrait Gallery, London, UK.

This mystery starts at Abbotsford in Roxburghshire, Scotland. Abbotsford was the home of the famous poet and author Sir Walter Scott (1771 – 1832). Today the estate is administered by the Abbotsford Trust. Sir Walter Scott was a great writer. He was born in Scotland, in Edinburgh's Old Town. His most famous book, *Ivanhoe* (1820), is a moral tale on male power and the abuse of women and racial minorities.

Sir Walter Scott is one of the most successful authors of all time and is the second-most quoted writer in the Oxford English Dictionary, after William Shakespeare. Scott created the stately home and estate at Abbotsford, Scotland, which was completed in 1824.¹

The Sundial

What is the connection between Sir Walter Scott, Abbotsford in Scotland, and Hillside, Menands, NY? In the gardens at Abbotsford, Scotland, is what remains of Sir Walter Scott's sundial, as shown in Figure 2 below.

The pedestal is complete but the horizontal sundial which adorned the top is missing. Over the decades, this sundial has been referred to in various publications, most recently in the March 2019 edition of the British Sundial Society Bulletin by Denis Cowan². In the article, he refers to the fact that a replica sundial



Figure 2: *The pedestal of Scott's sundial at Abbotsford, Cowan 2019.*

was made for Hillside, Menands, NY, as shown in Figure 3. below. In 'Sun-Dials and Roses of Yesterday' by Alice Morse Earl, (1902 edition of the book ³), pages 12-13 show the replica sundial to be in existence at Hillside, NY, in the Shakespeare Garden border--See Figure 3 below.



Figure 3: *The replica sundial at Hillside, Menands, NY, c. 1902*

Therefore, the replica must have been made prior to 1902. In 'Ye Sundial Booke' by G Henslow⁴, there are two sketches by D. Hartley. The sketch on p. 246 shows the sundial pillar at Abbotsford, Scotland, and on p. 261, the replica sundial at Hillside is shown. These drawings were done in 1913. Additionally, in 'The Book of Sun-Dials' ⁵, on p.251, the author Mrs. Gatty apparently made her sketch of the sundial pillar at Abbotsford in 1839, but by then the sundial was missing.

In summary, the sundial at Abbotsford obviously disappeared prior to 1839. The replica sundial was clearly made prior to that date and existed at Hillside in 1902. Where, when, and by whom the sundials were made (original and replica) are not known.

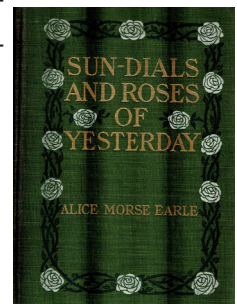
It is not known what the Scott sundial looked like. If the replica sundial made for Hillside could be traced, then a replacement replica could be made for Abbotsford in Scotland, the pillar then no longer standing silent and unadorned. I am a long standing member of the British Sundial Society and this mystery intrigued me. What was the connection between Sir Walter Scott and Hillside, Menands, NY? It was known that Scott moved in high circles of society including British royalty, but what was the American connection? Who commissioned the Hillside replica? Even the biography of Scott by J G Lockhart⁶, considered the definitive history on Scott, provides no clues about the sundial and its replica nor any American

connection. Given the prosperity of Scott at this period of his life, one can assume that the sundial would have been of fine quality, probably made by a well-known maker of the time. Similarly, I would guess that the commissioned replica would also have been high quality, so unlikely in the following decades to have been discarded as trivia. So what happened to the replica, or where is it?

The owner of Hillside was Mr. Dean Sage (1841 – 1902)⁷, who was, amongst other things, a very enthusiastic fly fisherman. He wrote the famous fly fishing book ‘Ristigouche and its Salmon Fishing’ of 1888⁸. In Alice Morse Earle’s book on sundials, she states that the Hillside sundial was ‘commissioned by the publisher Douglas’. The book by Dean Sage on fishing was published by David Douglas of Edinburgh. It would seem likely that the Douglas in question is one and the same. Abbotsford, the home of Sir Walter Scott, is on the banks of the River Tweed, and has been famous for salmon fishing since Roman times. The Tweed Commissioners whose responsibility was to manage the river and its fish was set up by Scott in 1805. Dean Sage could never have known Scott, who died in 1832 before Dean Sage was born in 1841, but it seems likely that Dean Sage visited Abbotsford at some time as part of his salmon fishing interest.

Scott kept a daily journal from 1827 until his death in 1832. The journal consists of two volumes, Vol. 1 (1825 – 1827) and Vol. 2 (1827 – 1832). These journals were published in 1890 by David Douglas of Edin-

burgh⁹. In the frontispiece of each volume is a sketch of the Scott sundial at Abbotsford. In addition, in the frontispiece of Vol. 1 is a quote by Scott, “I put that text, many a year ago on my dial stone”. Thus, the sundial must have been at Abbotsford in 1825 at the start of his journals. Further research has led to the discovery that the frontispiece sketch of the sundial was done by a famous Scottish artist, George Reid. Reid was born in 1841, the same year as Dean Sage, so they may have met via the common link of David Douglas. Now, Reid was well known for his sketches of the River Tweed and surrounding area. We know that the Scott sundial disappeared before 1839 and the sketches by Reid for the journal print were done on or around 1890, when only the pedestal remained. Maybe at Douglas’s request, Reid sketched the sundial pillar so that Dean Sage could have a replica pedestal made, and used ‘artistic license’ to include a sundial atop the plinth. This would explain why the drawing by Reid of the sundial in the 1890 publication shows the sundial to have a pierced gnomon (the shadow-casting part of the sundial), which is what one would expect for the period. In contrast, the Alice Morse Earle photograph of 1901 shows the sundial to have a rather heavy, solid gnomon. In both the drawing and the photograph, no detail of the sundial plate can be seen.



Alice Morse Earle, Sundials and Roses of Yesterday, The Macmillan Co., 1902

Summary

I consider the link has been established between the Scott sundial and the replica at Hillside. However, it looks as though only the pillar was a replica, as the Scott sundial had long since gone by the time that Dean Sage visited Abbotsford and subsequently commissioned a replica. There is, of course, one other possibility: that at the time of Dean Sage's visit to Abbotsford, although the Scott sundial was missing, there was still a maker's drawing of it in existence. If this was the case, then the Hillside sundial could well be a replica sundial in addition to the replica pedestal.

Please note that I am carrying out this research in conjunction with Mr. Kevin M. Franklin, the Municipal Historian for the town of Colonie, NY, which encompasses the village of Menands.

Martin A. Jenkins
British Sundial Society

References and Notes

1. The Abbotsford Trust, Melrose, Roxburghshire, Scotland. www.scottsassbotsford.com, accessed March 2020.
2. D. Cowan, BSS Bulletin, Vol 31 (i), p11, March 2019.
3. Alice Morse Earle, Sundials and Roses of Yesterday, The Macmillan Co., 1902, pp12-13.
4. T. Geoffrey W Henslow, Ye Sundial Booke, W&G Foyle Ltd., 1935, pp246, 261.
5. A Gatty, The Book of Sun-Dials, George Bell and Sons, London, 1872, p252.
6. J. G. Lockhart, The Life of Sir Walter Scott, Adam and Charles Black, London, 1893.
7. Kevin M. Franklin, The Sage Family and Their Estates (parts 1 and 2), The Colonie Historical Oracle, 2009.
8. Dean Sage, Ristigouche and its Salmon Fishing, David Douglas, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1888.
9. Sir Walter Scott, The Journal of Sir Walter Scott, from the original manuscript at Abbotsford, Vol. 1&2, David Douglas, Edinburgh, 1890.

Another Mystery

Included in our HSTC collection is a bell from Shaker High School with an inscription. Our records do not show who donated it or what it commemorates. If you have information about it, contact us via email at:

historical.society.town.colonie@gmail.com



HOLD THE DATE--

HSTC Presentation

Sunday October 30th

2:00PM to 3:30 PM

Colonie Town Library

AFTERTHOUGHT ABOUT HILLSIDE--

By

Kevin Franklin

Did Dean Sage ever visit Abbotsford? Apparently Dean Sage and his wife sailed around England and Scotland in the late 19th or early 20th Century but there is no documentation that directly indicates a visit to Abbotsford.

However, Dean Sage was the oldest son of Henry Williams Sage, the father and founder of the immensely wealthy Sage Family land holdings and lumber manufacturing enterprise of the mid to late 19th Century. Although connected financially to the Sage Company, Dean Sage, who was also independently wealthy, was more fond of pursuing his love of fly fishing and duck hunting, especially fly fishing for salmon on the Restigouche River in Canada. His late 19th Century "vacation" to tour the British Isles by yacht may have been the time that he was introduced to Abbotsford, in Scotland. He may have even fished in the river adjoining the Abbotsford Estate.

WE MADE A MISTAKE--

In the last issue of the newsletter, we mistakenly identified the gentleman standing in the Shaker Cemetery as Art Johnson. We received a call from Ed Engle, who loved the newsletter but identified the person on the cover shown in the Shaker Cemetery as his grandfather Walter Engle. Apparently Walter was showing Art Johnson the gravestones of the various people he remembered when the Shakers will still active in the community. The photo of Mr. Engle was likely taken by Art Johnson when he was documenting the site.

I have a letter from a relative of the former-groundskeeper for the Sage Estate in Menands (he was her great-great-great grandfather) who was originally from Scotland. I have reached out to her to see if she has any more information about her distant Scottish relative and to determine whether she might have any photos of the Sage Garden and the sundial of Sir Walter Scott.

UPDATE:

We were officialty notified that the Mark House, possibly the oldest extant farmhouse in the Town of Colonie, was added to the National Register of Historic Places as of August 29th, 2022. This Revolutionary War Soldier and Van Rensselaer tenant farmer's house is now on both the New York State and National Registers of Historic Places. More information to follow.

We Want New Members!

Please join the The Historical Society of the Town of Colonie and support our efforts to increase awareness and appreciation of our important history.

We Need You!

**Please visit our Facebook Page at:
Historical Society Town of Colonie**



Please visit our website at:

<https://www.colonie.org/departments/historian/historicalsociety/>

NOTE:

The Volume/Issue Date of this Newsletter is Correct--This is another catch-up issue

Yes, I would like to become a new member of the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie, New York, Inc. in the classification I have checked or renew my membership as noted.

My annual dues payment in the amount of \$_____ is enclosed.

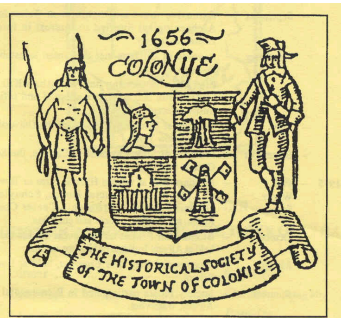
<i>Classification</i>	<i>Annual Dues</i>	<i>Classification</i>	<i>Annual Dues</i>	<i>Classification</i>	<i>Annual Dues</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Student & Senior .	\$10.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$15.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting	\$100—\$250
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$12.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Business	\$50.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor . . .	\$250.00 & Up

Please accept my additional donation of \$_____ as a gift to the Historical Society. The Historical Society is a not-for-profit 501c3 corporation.

Name _____
 Address _____
 City/Town _____ Zip Code _____ Home Phone # _____
 Cell Phone # _____ E-Mail _____

Please mail to: Membership Chairperson c/o Historical Society, Memorial Town Hall,
 534 New Loudon Rd, Latham, N. Y. 12110-0508

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I am hopeful that as we start a new cycle of HSTC programming this fall that we are past the worst constraints of COVID. It has been a difficult two and half years for sure. We look forward to moving back to our regular series of Sunday programs at the Town Library, among other activities. As noted elsewhere in this newsletter, we have scheduled our first Sunday Historical Presentation of the year for October 30th at the Colonie Town Library. Details to follow.

Come and visit us at our Path Through History Event at the Schuyler Flatts on October 8th from 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM.

Support the Historical Society's efforts to stimulate an appreciation of the historical heritage of your community. Join Now!

Michael S. Radlick, Ph.D. President

Kevin Franklin: Town Historian

Current Officers of the Society

- President:** Dr. Michael Radlick
- Vice President:** David (Yizhen Lin
- Treasurer:** Laraine Gillette
- Recording Secretary:** Barbara McCarthy
- Corresponding Sec:** Susan Ivy Mahar
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- Membership Chair:** Karen Senecal
- Newsletter Editor:** Joe Erkes

Welcome New Members!

The Historical Society of the Town of Colonie would like to welcome our newest members:

- Elana Hogan
- Bill and Mary Roylance
- Michele Scambelluri
- Betty Ann Thomas