

Bethlehem Historical Association

NEWSLETTER

Fall 2022



The Flora Fossil Forager of Font Grove: Winifred Goldring's Incredible Legacy in Prehistoric Paleontology

By Bill Ketzer

News flash! A century ago, the circumstances that allowed a woman's rise to prominence in their profession regularly depended not upon education, skill, competitiveness, or eye for innovation, but whether they came from a prominent family, or married into wealth or status. Every once in a while, however, someone like Dr. Winifred Goldring, a lifelong Slingerlands native, shunned those sad, centuries-old standards to blaze their own sentient trail, or in her case... trowel.

Enjoying neither of the above privileges, Dr. Goldring rose through the ranks of the New York State Museum's male-dominated bureaucracy to become the first woman in history to be appointed State Paleontologist (1939), and also the first to serve as president of the Paleontological Society (1949). Highly skilled and comfortable in the laboratory, field, or exhibition hall, she remains one of the world's most respected geoscientists, having advanced not only her agency's "arduous program of research"^[1] and the profession of paleontology for women, but scientific education in museums as well.

Her father Frederick, an English immigrant from Sussex, came from a noted family of horticulturalists and tended Erastus Corning Jr.'s exotic, world-renown orchids at his compound in Kenwood (now part of Glenmont). In the United States, however, he was essentially another migrant laborer with the equivalent of an 8th grade education, arriving here after a chance meeting with Corning – son of the railroad magnate, senator and congressman of the same name, as well as the grandfather to Albany's longest-serving mayor – during a tour of London's Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in 1879.^[2] His intention was to stay in the States for a few months of study but ended up in Corning's employ for 11 years. Love can do that to you; future wife Mary Grey also lived in proximity,

daughter of a rugged Scotsman who was superintendent of the wealthy family's grounds. Before long they had eight children – all girls but one – so with space growing tight (and Corning's blessing), the family moved to Font Grove Road to establish a successful, wholesale floral business in 1890.

Some old-timers may remember Font Grove as the 600-acre estate of prominent attorney and businessman Colonel James Hendrick and wife Judith Anne Wands in the mid-19th Century. In addition to dairy farming and other ventures, they had extensive greenhouses and conservatories; the Goldring's rented these from the Hendrick family until purchasing them outright in 1906.^[3] Some of Font Grove's esoterically-named residences from that era still stand today (The Grey Gables B & B, for example), but sadly the Goldring's charming French Second Empire home at 136 Font Grove appears to have been demolished sometime after 1984.

A few of the Goldring children followed their father into the family business, others into clerical, teaching and state office work, but young Winifred had her own ideas. In a memorial to his colleague following her death in 1971, Donald W. Fischer wrote, "As a small girl, Winifred was introduced to the wonders of nature during long hikes and picnics into the Helderbergs, when they were still unspoiled. Her attachment for these classic Lower Devonian rocks remained with her throughout her life."^[4] Whether intentional or not, her father's vast botanical knowledge would color this interest too, in a way no one predicted would make her a true pioneer in the earth sciences.



Left: Goldring at Mt. Rainier, 1928

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Like most of her siblings, Winifred attended school at the old District No. 9 schoolhouse in Slingerlands on Route 85 (then called Plank Road) before graduating as class valedictorian at Albany's Milne School in 1905. After delivering a "unique and clever" valedictory address,¹⁵¹ her interest in paleontology blossomed at Wellesley College. She finished her graduate work there in 1912, while also studying geography at Harvard and completing additional coursework at Columbia. After a brief teaching stint in Boston, she returned home for a summer job as a "Special Temporary Expert" at the State Museum to create fossil invertebrate exhibits. Like her father on old Corning's farm however, it was soon clear that this was no fleeting arrangement; she remained at the museum for her entire 40-year career!

Her first job was creating exhibits for the museum's Hall of Invertebrate Paleontology. Instead of just filling glass cases with fossils as suggested by her superiors, Winifred created educational narratives for her displays, like "What is a Fossil?" and "What is a Geological Formation?" that were considered models for learning at the facility.¹⁶¹

Impressed by her meticulous work ethic and praising her as a "particularly hardy seeker after the truth," museum director John Mason Clarke asked her to coordinate New York's extensive collections of both catalogued and un-studied fossil crinoids (sea lilies). After seven years of comprehensive study, she published a 670-page tome systematizing the ancient flora into 25 families, 60 genera and 155 species – 58 of them new to science.¹⁷¹ This work immediately made her an internationally recognized expert on the group.

Dr. Goldring again made headlines in the 1920s for what became one of the earliest "salvage paleontology" efforts in the world, and the first major paleontology project on record headed by a woman. The excavation was in Schoharie County and contained one of the world's oldest known fossilized forests, one that existed when North America was located well below the equator and predated dinosaurs by 130 million years. Urgency arose due to a dam being constructed to flood the quarry where the specimens were located along Schoharie Creek, subsequently submerging the Town of Gilboa to increase New York City's water supply. Thanks to her team, stumps from the forest – roughly 400 million years old and among the first plants on earth to have a tree-like form – were saved before the reservoir was filled. Her 1924 synopsis of this work concluded the stumps were a new genus of "seed ferns" she named *Eospermatoperis*, a designation that would stand for eight decades. For this she again gained critical acclaim in the chronicles of earth science.

But did the general public know who she was? Perhaps not by name. Yet anyone visiting the museum when housed in Albany's State Education Building was quite familiar with



Goldring's 1925 Gilboa Exhibit

the full-scale diorama she created based on the Gilboa work. This was more than a simple recreation of an ancient forest; it was likely the first-ever habitat diorama of ancient life. In the foreground were rocks of Gilboa age with the three horizons where stumps were found clearly marked. In the middle ground were reconstructed trees based on her drawings, and in the back a painting of the forest by French artist Henri Marchand and his sons.¹⁸¹ It was impossible to find a geology textbook without a picture of this stunning emulsification of science and art, and it was displayed on the 5th floor of the building until the Museum relocated to Empire State Plaza in the mid-1970s. What's more, she completed it *during* – not after – the Gilboa excavation. Talk about multi-tasking!

Given the high quality and sheer volume of her work, one would assume that her rise through the ranks to her appointment as State Paleontologist at the onset of World War 2 would be a given; unfortunately, this was not the case.

Though Goldring had the support and respect of close colleagues, many others, uncomfortable with a young, single woman doing geological field work, felt she should simply stay in the laboratory. Though regularly present at professional meetings and conferences, she was rarely invited on expeditions outside New York (this happened only twice in 40 years) and colleagues warned in correspondence the "limitations of taking women into the field." They framed it as a matter of propriety, that women shouldn't be seen scaling rocky outcroppings, picking through bedrock or examining a murky hole at a building site while construction workers looked on.¹¹⁰



There was even, remarkably, the matter of fashion. At the onset of her career, it would be another 25 years before women commonly wore pants, but Dr. Goldring had it covered; she made her own outfits with bloomers for fieldwork. When critics raised potential safety and liability issues as a result of leaving a woman to work alone in the field, she learned to shoot a revolver and cheerfully wore it as a sidearm.

But perhaps the most troubling form of gender discrimination she faced was fair compensation and opportunities for advancement. In 1918 she resigned briefly over issues of inadequate salary combined with the pressures of completing her exhibit work and working on the crinoid project. The following year in a letter she discussed the issue of whether a woman should even bother considering geology and paleontology as a vocation. She pointed out her salary of \$2,300 was half that of the (male) clerks and stenographers at the museum.¹¹¹



Coupled with John Clarke's tendency to put every commitment he couldn't meet on her shoulders, these inequities caused the young scientist to suffer a complete mental and physical breakdown in 1926, a chapter in her life that drove her to encourage girls to seek other careers in science – botany and zoology instead of paleontology – for almost the entire length of her tenure. Thankfully she made a full

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Our annual Holiday Open House is Sunday afternoon December 11. Stop by between 12 and 4 p.m. and enjoy the Winter Lights.

Election Day Bake Sale at the Cedar Hill Schoolhouse, 1003 River Road, Selkirk
You don't have to be a Cedar Hill voter to stop by and purchase some delicious, homemade baked goods.

Tuesday November 8, while the polls are open and while supplies last!

We need bakers! Drop your baked goods at the schoolhouse on Monday November 7 between 4 and 6 p.m. **OR** you can drop them off at Sue Gutman's, 10 Pine Street, Delmar any time during the day on the 7th.
 Direct your questions to Sue Gutman, 518-334-6219

Remembering the Zautner Apartments

The former buildings of the Slingerland Printing Company

By Sandra Paige Sorell

My family and I lived in the apartments in the summers of 1953 and 1954 while my dad, Harry W. Paige, was working on his master's at SUNYA. I was about five and my sister Judy was about one. The summer of '53 was one of the hottest on record and there we were, a young family of four, in a 2-bedroom apartment with no cross ventilation. I remember Mom put my sister and I in the bathtub to keep us cool. I would fall asleep at night with my nose pressed against the screen hoping for a breath of air. I can still smell the lead paint on the screen. The heat was oppressive. Near the end of the summer, I remember my paternal grandparents bringing us a small metal table fan. If you stuck your finger thru the wire cover and near the blades, that could have been the end of your finger.

Those two summers my mom, Ruth Killough Paige, worked at the Toll Gate to supplement the family income. (She also had a huge sweet tooth.) We were frequent visitors to the Gate for afternoon ice cream cones or sodas, and also evening dinner. There was a nice waitress there named Velma we got to be friends with. There were TVs mounted on the walls and I remember seeing Patti Page sing "How Much is that Doggie in the Window?". There was a large Juke Box near the front door we loved to play. Mr. Zautner was usually on the premises overseeing things. I played with his daughter or granddaughter in one of the apartments. Either the girl or her grandfather or both lived there. We used to love to run up and down the long, dark apartment halls. It was very spooky for little kids. Ah, the good old days when things were simple and we didn't require much to have a good time.



The old Zautner apartments seen here in 2009.

A Trail of Accessibility, Wildlife and Family History

By John Smolinsky

In Early October 2022 New York State Dept of Environmental Conservation announced the opening of a new trail connecting the Five Rivers Environmental Center with Slingerlands neighborhoods. The trail, on a 35 acre property owned by the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy, is constructed in compliance with DEC accessibility guidelines and includes an elevated viewing platform and accessible benches along the trail. Parking areas and information kiosks are located at off Fisher Blvd and at Mason Lane.

The Trail is officially called the **Fisher Trail**. The trail name refers to the mammal, a fisher, which is a member of the weasel family found at Five Rivers and to the access point, Fisher Blvd. Digging a little deeper into the name we can find a multi-generation Fisher family history associated with the area.

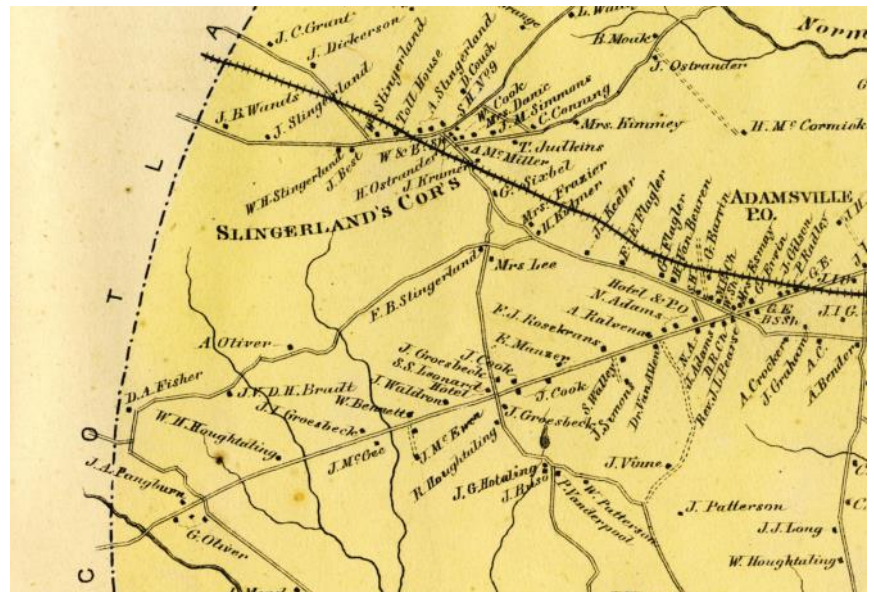
The name of Fisher Blvd. is linked to the Fisher Family. On July 15, 1854, Albert I. Slingerland and his wife, Catherine, deeded the 119.18 acre farm at 421 Orchard St to Daniel G. Fisher of Berne. The farmhouse is said to be built in 1790. Former Town of Bethlehem Historian, Allison Bennet, wrote of the property "Across the road is an old burial ground, containing an impressive monument to Duncan Fisher Sr. and his wife Isabella Harrower, and also Daniel G. Fisher, undoubtedly the man mentioned in the deed of 1854 (died 1866) and his wife Magdalene Hungerford. Here too, are stones to Duncan Jr., and David Fisher, these men dying in the 1880s." The cemetery on Orchard St. is now overgrown but one or two taller monuments are visible.

Bennett continued "At one time the Fisher domain extended all the way from Delaware Turnpike along Orchard Blvd. [*sic, this probably was meant to be Fisher Blvd*] up to and including the house on New Scotland Rd. in Slingerlands". The house, known as the Wand House, is the large white house on N. Scotland Ave opposite Fisher Blvd. The house was built in 1841 on a large dairy Farm operated by the Fishers.

A short distance from the new Fisher Trailhead is a farmhouse at 65 Fisher Blvd., built in the 1870s (but the homestead may have originated in the 1700s) and bought by the Fisher family in the 1800s. Up until the year 2000, it was the home of Kathryn Fisher Carrington, locally known as "The Pumpkin Lady", who was a Fisher descendent.

This short piece of local history and Family Legacy adds a thoughtful dimension to the beautiful Fisher trail. It would be interesting to learn the boundaries of the Fisher property and the extent of farming activities over the years.

The sources for the above information are: "Times Remembered" (1984) by Allison Bennett, Page 88, and two Bethlehem historical Tour descriptions prepared by the Bethlehem Historical Association (1993) and the Town of Bethlehem (2007).



TOP: Fisher Road entrance to the Fisher Trail
MIDDLE: Gate to the Fisher Family Burial Ground
BOTTOM: A portion of the 1866 Beers map of Bethlehem. At the lower left you can see D.A. Fisher.

A New Addition

by Karen Beck

There is something magical about a dollhouse. Those of us lucky enough to have had one as a child will never forget rearranging the tiny furnishings over and over. Adults continue to find them irresistible.

The earliest known replicas of home interiors date back to the 17th c., but those models were not for children. They were used as a display of wealth. Much later in the late 19th c, as opinions about childhood changed, the concept of play emerged. In addition, the Industrial Revolution enabled toys, including doll houses for wealthy children, to be manufactured. At that time, dollhouses generally were elaborate replicas of the home in which the child resided. It was not until the mass production of toys after WWII that dollhouses became commonplace.

We currently have two dollhouses at the museum. One was made in 1909 by Howard Salisbury for his niece, Amy. Mr. Salisbury's creation echoed Amy's home on Delaware Avenue. (That building, now remodeled, still stands next door to Phillips Hardware.)

Recently, we were fortunate to acquire a unique doll house that was furnished by Anna Uhl, a BHA member until her death in December 2021. We are grateful to her daughter, Joanne Susser, for the donation. Mrs. Uhl, an accomplished miniaturist, included many elements of a well-furnished home in the late Victorian period. The house is electrified, and we hope to have it lit for our Holiday Open House on Dec. 11.



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recovery, and while her promotions came slowly, they did come. Leaders in the Legislature and Governor Lehman's office opposed her appointment as the Museum's chief of paleontology, but she applied the principals that brought her to their doorsteps in the first place – toughness, integrity, assiduity – and with the support of several male mentors like Dr. Rudolph Reudemann and Dr. Charles Adams, the quality of her work could not be denied.

Winifred never married; a point frequently noted as a strength in that era to increase a woman's opportunities for advancement. She rarely pursued other interests in her personal life, with the exception of piano and violin, and upon her retirement largely withdrew from public affairs save the occasional Wellesley reunion (her neighbor and well-known Bethlehem politico Ruth Miner was also a Wellesley alum). She lived in the family home on Font Grove Road until her death, enjoying the sprawling gardens her father worked a lifetime to cultivate. No doubt wild scores of those plantings still survive today, as does the legacy of the "Grandame of New York State Paleontology."

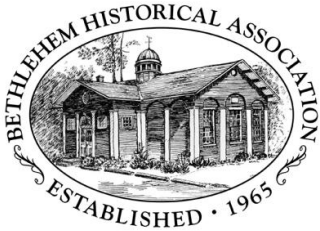


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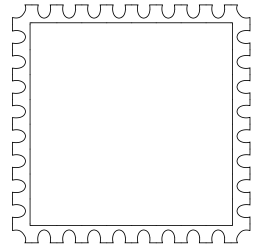
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Bethlehem Historical Association

Cedar Hill Schoolhouse Museum
P.O. Box 263
Selkirk, NY 12158



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The Bethlehem Historical Association

Cedar Hill Schoolhouse Museum
1003 River Road
P.O. Box 263
Selkirk, NY 12158
(518) 767-9432
bethhist1965@gmail.com
BethlehemHistorical.org

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EVENTS Calendar

November 8
Election Day Bake Sale
at the schoolhouse while supplies last.

November 9
Ted Hilscher speaks about ***Local Barns***
7 p.m. at the Bethlehem Public Library

November 30
Marilyn Sassi speaks about ***American Folk Art***
7 p.m. at the Bethlehem Public Library

December 11
Holiday Open House—Winter Lights
Stop by the schoolhouse between 12 and 4 p.m.

Regular museum open hours resume in February 2023

