

Enterprise and Courage: The Civil War Years at Mohonk

While tensions brew between North and South during the 1850s, an idea brews in the mind of an Ulster County farmer. His idea is simple yet grand: establish a must-see destination at a remarkable lake high atop the Shawangunk Mountains.



Lake Mohonk House, 1860s, John F. Stokes, Prop. Currier & Ives, Library of Congress #LC-USZC2-2740

Visitors to Mohonk Lake saw a very different place during the Civil War. Find out how different as author Robi Josephson, pictured at Mohonk, traces the earliest days of the mountain house tradition there.

Discover how it all began at Mohonk Lake as local author Robi Josephson presents this fascinating illustrated program.

“John F. Stokes started the mountain house tradition at Mohonk Lake,” Josephson says. “He wrestled with a rocky terrain and within ten years was attracting visitors from as far as Long Island and Pennsylvania.”

During his lifetime, Stokes was called a man of “enterprise and courage.” Josephson sees those words also applying to those who scratched a living from the Shawangunks and fought a civil war far from their mountain homes.

Some of those Civil War soldiers came from now-vanished villages near Mohonk. When the war ended in 1865, survivors returned to the mountain, and Americans—1,400 that year—celebrated with a visit to the Lake Mohonk House of John F. Stokes.

Such was his hospitality that guests dubbed Mohonk’s host “Uncle John.” By decade’s end, Mohonk Lake was as popular as ever, but in 1869 Uncle John sold out to Albert K. Smiley, a Quaker and educator from Providence, Rhode Island. Albert and his twin brother, Alfred H. Smiley, thus began a new chapter at Mohonk Lake, one their descendants continue more than 140 years later.

Josephson will be selling and signing copies of her book, *Mohonk: Mountain House and Preserve* (2002), a picture history in Arcadia Publishing’s Images of America series. Her new book, Released October 2013, is a history of the Trapps Mountain Hamlet, co-authored with Mohonk Preserve historian Bob Larsen, published by Black Dome Press, Delmar, New York.



Antique postcard above. Learn where this Civil War monument stands today and how it is connected to a vanished village near Mohonk.