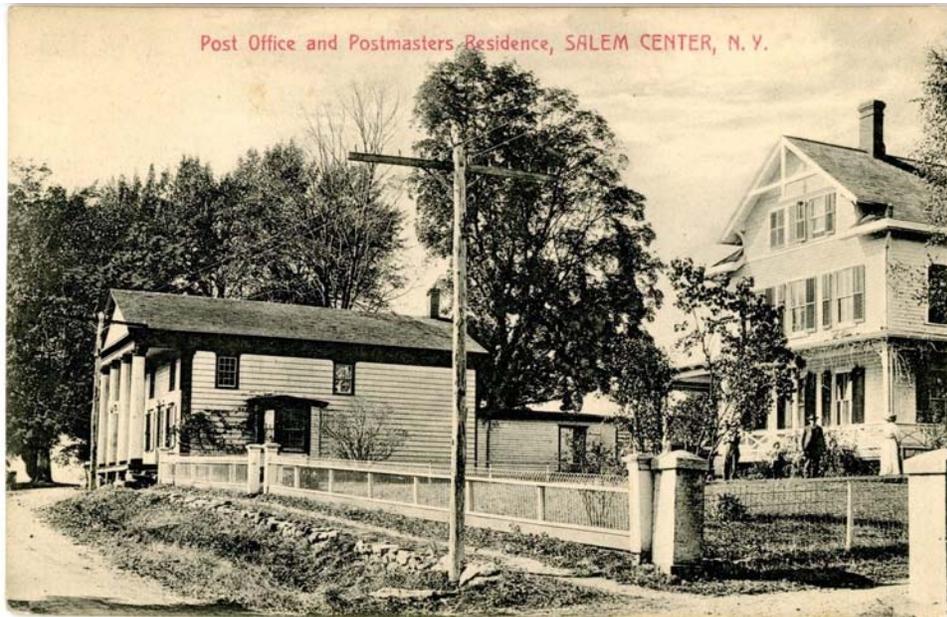


## Backward Glances: The Soul of Salem Center

Susan Thompson



*Lobdell Store and Post Office and Lobdell House before the store was moved back to become the North Salem Courthouse.  
Postcard courtesy of Cynthia Curtis.*

Almost everyone in town knows the story of Delancey Hall. But what do you know about the other two historic buildings that comprise the Town Hall complex and the folks who built them? Lobdell House was built in 1883-84 by Albert Jenkins Lobdell (1854 - 1928) for his wife Mary Louise Braden (1862-1954). The home, called Hickory Glen Farm, was originally a few hundred yards west, just past Mills Road on the north side of Titicus Road. When the City of New York took land for the construction of Titicus Reservoir, many properties along Titicus Road were moved or taken down. When the Lobdells moved their home, they did it not via Titicus Road but cross country. A team of horses towed the house on huge log rollers behind the Uriah Wallace House and Delancey Hall to its present location. All of the buildings on the south side of Titicus Road opposite Delancey -- including Lobdell Store & PO and the mills -- were also moved.

The Lobdell Store and Post Office (the Greek revival building called The Annex), built before 1850, was moved in 1893 to the north side of the road between Lobdell House and Delancey Hall. Later, when the town acquired both the store and the house, the store was moved to its current location to serve as the North Salem Courthouse. Now preparations are underway to reconfigure the interior of the building to house the North Salem Building Department.

Members of the Lobdell family came from England, and settled in Milford and Ridgefield CT, then in North Salem in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They leased land from Stephen Delancey in Cortlandt Manor (the western 2/3 of today's North Salem), then began to purchase property beginning in 1773 (Daniel Lobdell) and 1774 (John Lobdell). Ebenezer leased 200 acres from Delancey that he purchased after the Revolution. They created homes and businesses here in Salem Center (called Delancey Town in the 1700s) and farms on today's June Road. Family members served in the French and Indian War and in the Revolution, including veteran Jacob Lobdell (1757-1834) who is buried in June Cemetery.

The Lobdells and their home and store were the heart and soul of Salem Center for more than 175 years. The branch of the family that ran the store and post office and built Hickory Glen Farm are direct descendants of Ebenezer. Starting in 1815, Anson Lobdell, his son Anson Whitney and then grandson Albert Jenkins Lobdell all lived in the house on the west side of Delancey (The Uriah Wallace House, a town of North Salem Historic Landmark). The store, when it was across the street, was acquired from Clark Stevens by Anson Whitney Lobdell in 1866, and it is likely that Stevens and Lobdell were partners before that. Anson Whitney Lobdell ran the post office in his store. His wife, Mary Jenkins Lobdell, taught at the North Salem Academy (Delancey Hall), where her father was principal. Town minutes record many meetings at the store and in the hall above it. When Anson Whitney died in 1872, his son Albert Jenkins Lobdell took over both the store and the postmaster's job.

Following his marriage to Mary Louise Braden, Albert designed the house, where the couple raised six children. Hickory Glen was ahead of its time. It was the first house on the east side of town to have electricity, fed by an Exide storage battery system housed in the rear of the store. The system provided enough extra juice to light two big evergreens at Christmas time that could be seen twinkling in the distance from the top of the dam in Purdys.

While Albert tended the store -- which sold everything from food and spirits to candles and cloth -- and town business, Mary Lou was active in the DAR (a Baxter and Braden descendant), the Universalist Church and the Red Cross. Albert and Mary Lou's sons Augustus Whitney (called Whit), Albert (called Bert) and Paul all served as clerks for the post office. Albert held a number of town positions including sealer of weights and measures, town clerk and supervisor from 1915-1928. His store was a mecca for the transaction of town business, gossip, fun and camaraderie. It became even more popular when Albert displayed a two-pound meteorite that had landed on his farm. He called it the "biggest ad I ever had" -- until someone stole the rock.

Tragedy struck the family in 1918 when Bert was killed in action in France. Private Lobdell, a member of Company L, 107<sup>th</sup> infantry, died on the first day of the battle that resulted in the breaking of the Hindenburg Line. The World War I Memorial in front of

Delancey Hall was erected in honor of Bert and others from North Salem who served in the Great War.

Albert and Mary Lou also had three daughters. Louise married Leander Gregory of Carmel, NY, and moved to Croton Falls. Sister Cornelia followed family tradition and served as Postmistress in the family store from 1914 until 1951. She and her sister Jane (called Jennie) lived at Hickory Glen with their mother. Mary Louise died in 1954. The house and the store were deeded to the town with the understanding that Cornelia and Jennie could remain in the house. Cornelia died in 1964, Jennie in 1995.

Many Lobdell descendants remain in the area and visit the family homestead. Albert Lobdell Gregory (named for his uncle Bert), who lives in Connecticut, reminisces about holidays and summers spent with his aunts in the house, sleeping in the room that is now the Town Historian's office. His cousin Whit often joined him in escapades around the farm, including driving an old Model A, picking hazelnuts and fishing in the pond. His sister Mary Louise Maier, remained in North Salem all her life and carried on family tradition by working in the Supervisor's office.

Al's daughter Tricia Gregory and Reginald White, grandson of Augustus Whitney Lobdell, are frequent visitors and share their stories and memorabilia. Tricia is a Trustee of the North Salem Historical Society, and Reg, who wrote two bulletins about the Lobdells and their buildings for the Society, is Archivist at the Putnam County Archives.