

The Boy With The Boot

by Marion M. Dumond

Former Town of Wawarsing Historian
and Ellenville Public Library Director (Retired)

(As the statue of "The Boy With the Boot" graces the cover of our premiere issue, it seemed fitting to have one of our community's most knowledgeable experts on local history unfold the fascinating story of this mysterious icon. Not satisfied to just gloss over the highlights, Mrs. Dumond began deeply researching the story with gusto, to present this definitive version of the tale.

In future issues, we hope that Mrs. Dumond, and perhaps John Unverzagt – who provided the photo of the old fountain in front of the Hartshorn house – as well as other community "keepers of the flame," will share their memories and insights, tales and legends, images and artifacts, from and about this historically-rich region.)

Only a small number of communities in the world have a statue of the mysterious "Boy With the Leaking Boot" on public display. And Ellenville is home to not just one... nor only two... but three of the legendary figures.

The statue depicts a young boy standing with his feet planted firmly apart, right pants leg rolled up above his bare foot, cap perched on the back of his curly head, ruefully looking at a leaking boot held in his right hand.

The youngest of the "Boys" was commissioned by the Village of Ellenville Board of Trustees in 1997 to replace a damaged statue of an egret (or was it supposed to be a swan? a stork?) which graced the fountain in **Liberty Square**, where a fountain has stood for more than 125 years.

The first fountain was on the lawn of the home of Charles Hartshorn, which stood where the **Hunt Memorial Building** still stands (see photos). Mr. Hartshorn was the first President of the Village of Ellenville in 1856 and a leading citizen. His son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Tuthill, lived with him and inherited the house at his death. In 1875, they gave a large section of their front yard, containing the fountain, to the Village of Ellenville, "for the purpose of a public square, and the maintenance of a fountain thereon at or about the site of the present fountain." The deed also stipulates that, if the Village did not live up to the terms of the gift, the land would revert to the Tuthills and their heirs.

Early pictures show a tiered fountain with no statuary for a time. A statue of Cupid was there for a while and, for the longest period, a stork, or egret, or swan spread his golden wings and stretched his neck high into the air, water spouting from his beak. Repeated vandalism caused the demise of the bird and the fountain was unadorned until the Village Board held a contest, seeking ideas for a replacement. Once the suggestion that a replica of the familiar "Boy With the Boot" triumphed, research and negotiations led to the decision to retain the artistic talents of a local sculptor.

Matt Pozorsky Sculptureworks of Phillipsport



The Hartshorn House and Fountain, above, as it appeared over 100 years ago (photo courtesy of John Unverzagt), and the Fountain, Boy With Boot, and Hunt Memorial Bldg. today.



produced and installed a bronze statue of the "Boy With the Boot" by duplicating the almost 75-year-old "Boy" owned by the *Scoresby Hose, Hook & Ladder Company*. The process involved making wax castings of the different sections of the statue, filling the molds with molten bronze, welding the cooled sections together, and then smoothing the welds. A new boot also had to be cast, since the Scoresby "Boy" had lost his boot long ago. "The Boy" was installed on the fountain in mid-1998 and seems very comfortable, almost as if he had always been there.

But what about Ellenville's two other Boys? Each has his own story.

The first was produced by J.L. Mott Foundry and Iron Works, and is linked with the name of Henry Brodhead. Generations of Brodheads had lived in the beautiful old stone house on Leurenkill Road south of Ellenville. Henry was paymaster for J.L. Mott Foundry & Iron Works in New York and left them when the company moved to Trenton, N.J. in 1908, so it is presumed that "the Boy" came to Ulster County before that date. The Brodhead Boy has long stood on the lawn of the historic house, which dates back to 1752 or 1753. It is presently owned by Daniel and Victoria (Little) Anderson who have their "Boy" in seclusion to arrest deterioration. He is waiting for some fairly extensive restoration in the future. ↗

According to Historian Katharine T. Terwilliger, the fire company purchased the Scoresby "Boy" from J.L. Mott in 1925 for the sum of \$163.66. It was placed on a circular fountain constructed for the purpose in front of the **Scoresby Club House**, at the intersection of **Liberty and North Main Streets**. The *Ellenville Press* of September 10, 1925 described the statue as representing "a boy wading in a stream, who had removed a leaking boot and stands draining it out." Between several incidents of vandalism, or automobile accidents, and the widening of **Route 209**, requiring the demolition of the fountain on which it stood, the Scoresby "Boy" was moved inside the **Scoresby Club House** for some years. Most recently, this "Boy" has made the front parlor of **Terwilliger House** his home, where he is on long-term loan to the *Ellenville Public Library and Museum* at **40 Center Street**.

"The Boy With the Boot" has a variety of names, and a still-wider variety of legends connected with its creation, manufacture, country of origin, and what it represents. No one knows the name of the sculptor who created the statue, or the country of origin. Legend has the first statue coming from Germany, or Italy, or Belgium, or France. None of these claims have been substantiated. He is called "The Boy With the Leaking Boot," "Boy Immigrant," or "The Boy With the Leaky Boot." Mott's catalogs listed the statue as "Unfortunate Boot."

Several legends claim that the "Boy" represents a well-liked newsboy who sold his paper on the streets of a town in Italy, or another country, and drowned one day while fishing. Another is that he was a Civil War drummer boy who would pull off his boot, run down to a nearby creek holding his thumb in the hole in the toe of the boot, and bring back water to fever-stricken dying soldiers. Another is that he helped to put out fires by carrying water in his boot.


"Boys" have been made of "spelter" (a zinc alloy), pewter, bronze, and several other metals. Sam Karl of Ellenville produced ceramic miniatures that were in high demand.

Through the years, the file at the *Ellenville Public Library and Museum* has grown by the addition of postcards shared by other communities who have their own local legends about their "Boys," newspaper articles and independent research by "Boy With the Boot" devotees from around the globe, not the least of which was Ellenville's own Sam Karl, who dreamed of writing a book about the mysterious statue.

"Boys" have been located in Sandusky, Ohio; Winnipeg, Canada; Fresno, California; Houlton, Maine; Helena, Montana; Cleethorpes, England; Caracas, Venezuela; Stockholm, Sweden; Stevens Point, Wisconsin, and possibly another 20 locations. They are in parks, museums, libraries, and municipal buildings. At least two are called "the nickel and dime statue" because they were purchased with coins collected by children.

To learn more about this statue and its "brothers,"

visit the local history collection of the *Ellenville Public Library and Museum*; read Mary'n B. Rosson's "The Mystery of the Boy With Leaking Boot," or Katharine T. Terwilliger's book about Wawarsing or her newspaper columns; or visit Internet sites such as <http://houlton.com/boot.htm>, <http://ci.stevens-point.wi.us/fire/spfdstatue.htm>, or <http://www.rotaryclubhistory.org/cities/clubs/35international.htm>.

But, first of all, be sure to visit Ellenville's historic **Liberty Square** to meet Ellenville's own "Boy With the Leaking Boot." 



THA
Terrace Hill Insurance

Gloria Weiner

21 Market Street
P.O. Box 191
Ellenville, NY 12428

phone: 845-647-3165
fax: 845-647-3581
email: jjsglo@aol.com

JJ's Restaurant & Lounge

Kerhonkson, NY • 845-626-7371



LIVE BANDS!
Every Friday & Saturday
NO COVER CHARGE!
(call in advance for reserved seating)

KITCHEN OPEN
for Lunch & Dinner
WE DELIVER!
call for our daily specials
(\$15 minimum, 10 mile radius)

LANDSCAPING PLUS, INC.

Complete Landscaping Service

- Landscape design to installation
- Retaining Walls
- Lawn Aeration Programs

- Snow Plowing
- Irrigation Systems

- Pond Construction
- Tree Pruning
- Light Excavation

FULLY INSURED

Mark Beck Free Estimates (845) 647-6787

Now... Rentals, too! 

ELLENVILLE LUMBER CO., INC.

PO Box 267 • 211 Canal St.
Ellenville, NY 12428

Phone (845) 647-7700 Fax (845) 647-7701
E-Mail: irosenth@catskill.net