

**Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival
2019 Community Playwriting Workshops
Sarah Johnson, Ph.D., Public History Consultant**

The Harvest through History--links and images for playwriting inspiration!

There are many digital and traditional repositories with images of agriculture in our region. Make an appointment at your local historical society, municipal or county historian, or your local library to see if they have a local history collection of images and other primary sources. I have provided a number of images and links to images in digital collections to give you some historical context for your plays and inspire your characters and settings with aspects of regional history. The Digital Public Library of America has a great online collection of paintings and photographs of the harvest all across America. Many of these scenes convey what farm life looked like historically, sometimes idealized in nineteenth century paintings as a panacea to the grit of urban industrialization; sometimes bearing witness to the cruel fickleness of nature in 1930s agriculture by FSA (Farm Security Administration) photographers. The harvest, as this year's theme, can be extrapolated from the more general agricultural images I have provided here and ought to provide interesting narrative arcs for your plays! While we think of the harvest as a time of abundance, the flip side of scarcity may provide interesting insights about cycles of nature, and the lack of reliability of weather conditions conducive to farming and food production.

General regional background:

Native American Seed Sanctuary, pre-European contact foodways preservation project:

<http://hvfarmhub.org/seed-sanctuary/>



Rockland County Messenger, May 1, 1851, p.1 Poetry "The Beauties of Nature" <http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/lccn/sn83031487/1851-05-01/ed-1/seq-1/>
 sequence=0&proxdistance=5&county=&phrasetxt=&andtext=&date1=01%2F01%2F1725&city=&date2=12%2F31%2F2018&searchType=advanced
 &from_year=1725&proxtext=harvest+festival&dateFilterType=range&sort=date&SearchType=prox5&index=7&to_year=2018&rows=20&words=fe
 stive+Harvest&lccn=&am+p=&ortext=&page=1

The image shows two pages of a historical agricultural census form. The left page is a summary table with columns for various agricultural products and their quantities. The right page is a detailed schedule listing individual farms, their owners, and the specific types and quantities of agricultural products produced. The right page is titled "SCHEDULE 4 - Productions of Agriculture in Philipstown, County of Putnam, State of New York" and includes a list of farm names and owners such as Daniel Harkin, Daniel Harkin, Daniel Harkin, etc.

U.S. Census Non-Population Census, Production of Agriculture by State, then County, then Town, then further divided into sections.

The United States Census gathered data about agricultural production from 1850-1880, published as part of the non-census schedules, and available for many towns through your library's subscription to Ancestry.com. This is from Philipstown, area 3 in 1850. These agricultural schedules tell us a great deal about the types and quantities of production on each farm, how much land farmers had, how much was cleared or improved, numbers of animals raised, etc. It is also useful to check for a specific person in the industry schedules, as well, because many farmers had a related side hustle to bring in extra income. You could find and compare farms listed in the US Census data, and then find them on the 1854 O'Connor (or others) map of Putnam County in the Patterson Historical Society collection, where people paid the publisher to have their home/farm included: <https://cdm16694.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/pchc/id/256/rec/14>. Hudson River Valley Heritage has other maps specific to your area, to get a sense of exactly where the farm was located.

The evolution of local farms:

In the Colonial period, land was rented to farmers by patent owners like the Philipse family. Those that remained loyal to England lost their lands at the conclusion of the Revolutionary War. Some of those farms were sold to the long-standing tenants. The Dutchess County Historical Society and Putnam County Historian's Office have some examples of these 18th century patent/rental agreements. The Litchfield Historical Society currently has an exhibition that notes grain donated by Litchfield, CT to the Patriot cause during the Revolutionary War, suggesting its geographical neighbors also contribute food stuffs! As early as 1865 through about 1910, the coming of the New York City reservoir system to our region took away much of the prime, low lying farmland. Some farmers sold out or were forcibly bought out of their land, and it was subsequently flooded to contain urban water supplies. The rocky terrain made grain farming here difficult, as deep bedrock lies under most of this region's limited topsoil. The late-nineteenth century mechanization of farming was further complicated in this region by the presence of old stone fences, that cut the landscape up into small patches and prevented the physical entrance of labor-saving machinery into these small plots of land.

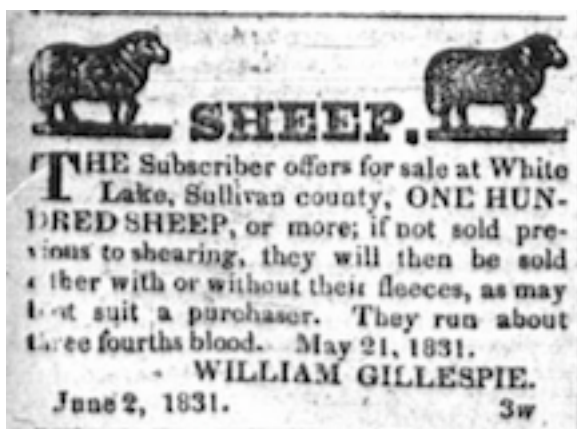
Lucas C. Barger (1866-1939) was a sixth-generation farmer in Putnam Valley, whose life span witnessed significant changes to farming the local landscape. A transcription of his story can be found here: <http://www.sunypress.edu/showproduct.aspx?ProductID=5625&SEName=life-on-a-rocky-farm>. Barger wrote in a vernacular style that may take a few pages to get used to, but this book is packed with anecdotal information about farm life.

"The Spirit of the Catskills," by Alf Evers (*Ulster Co. Gazette*, Sept. 1985), tells the story of an urban boy whose family moves to a farm near the Catskills in 1914, as part of the "back to the land" movement. The move did not go well because his parents had no experience farming, and the family moved to New Paltz several years later: <https://cdm16694.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/ucls/id/834/rec/11>

There are a number of horse farms in Putnam County, now. Victoria Dreyfuss owned Madrey farm, sold in 1976: <http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/lccn/sn84031640/1976-06-10/ed-1/seq-5/>. She was famous for breeding Percherons, a breed of French work horses, and promoted the breeding and use of them during World War II because of farm equipment shortages and fuel rationing. The Carmel Historical Society owns a scrapbook compiled during World War II by Ernestine Hamlin Baker, who led many local civilian defense committees and hosted a local radio program called Civilian Defense. Baker included a photograph of Victoria Dreyfuss's Persheron sale, currently on digital view at the Putnam History Museum's *Do Not Forget Me: A Brief History of Women in Putnam County*. Here is a link to Mrs. Dreyfuss judging horses in 1940: <http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/lccn/sn84031640/1940-03-14/ed-1/seq-5/>.

Wool production:

Sheep were easier to graze on the rocky farms in this region. Sheep provided wool that could be spun into yarn and knitted or woven into cloth. Here is an advertisement from a Sullivan County farm selling sheep in 1831, *Newburgh Telegraph*, Vol III, No. 12, June 2, 1831, p. 4:



FULLING, DYING, CLOTH DRESSING.

THE subscribers respectfully inform their friends and customers that they continue the above business at their old Stand, at Crist & Sears' Mills, in the village of Montgomery, Orange Co. The Machinery is in complete order, and in operation, and those who favour them with their custom may depend on having their work done in the best manner, and that there may be no mistake as regards the price, 4d per lb. will be charged for carding wool, of every description, without distinction of quality. They flatter themselves, that from their long experience in the business, they will be enabled to give the most entire satisfaction. They have employed ALBERT JESSUP, a man of unblemished moral character, and an experienced Manufacturer.

Their Carding establishment near St. Andrews is also in first rate order, and the prices for carding the same as above.

WALTER MEAD & SON.

June 7, 1831.

* * * The notes books and accounts are left with Philip Millspaugh, Esq. for adjustment. A speedy settlement is requested.

This advertisement from the Newburgh Telegram, August 18, 1831, p. 4, discusses the processing of Wool at one of these local mills, this one in Montgomery, in Orange County.

WOOL.

THE subscriber having fitted up his machines for

CARDING WOOL,

is now ready to wait upon all who may favour him with their patronage—and guarantee that work will be done as well at his shop and at as reasonable prices, as any shop in the country.

ABRAHAM S. POST.

Farmers Mills, June 20, 1849. 3w

For three weeks in 1849, Abram S. Post ran an advertisement in the *Putnam County Courier*, because he had changed the mill machinery to do wool carding at his mill at Farmers Mills in Kent, Putnam County, (June 27, 1849)

Dairy production

Brewster Standard article, October 13, 1916, p. 5. This article talks about the shift in milk delivery away from local businesses on Main Street in Brewster.

F. A. Holmes, the leading merchant of East Main street, complains of the loss of business due to the fact that the dairymen who formerly delivered there are now taking their milk to Dykemans, Towners, or some other station, if not taking care off it at home.

Pork production (*Brewster Standard*, June 22, 1944, p.5) and firewood (*Brewster Standard*, Dec 19, 1940) from Snowdale Farm, an African-American resort owned by Mary and A.J. Moran, and their son, Robert Moran outside Brewster, in the hamlet of Towners:

Thoroughbred Duroc Jersey Pigs, 6 weeks old, for sale. Augustus J. Moran, Big Elm Rd., R.D. 3, Brewster. Call after 5 p.m. or on Sunday. 9p6

WOOD FOR SALE
Robert A. Moran, Snowdale Farm, Brewster, N. Y. 30tf

HIGHLAND GRANGE FARM CREAMERY

GARRISON-ON-HUDSON.

PURE MILK,

RICH CREAM,

CHOICE BUTTER

Orders for the above may be sent by mail or given to driver of delivery wagon, and will receive prompt attention.

The patronage of the residents of Cold Spring, Nelsonville and vicinity is respectfully solicited and will be appreciated.

Creamery.

FARMERS are informed that the Creamery connected with the farm is now ready for business, and will pay the highest market price for pure, fresh milk in any quantity and every day in the year.

JOHN H. ISELIN.

Highland Grange Farm Creamery in Garrison, undated, likely from *Cold Spring Recorder*.

Apple production, Salinger's Orchard, Brewster, NY—4th generation run orchard, including bee keeping and egg production, historically.

Rob Salinger with historic records and honey jars, 2018



Salinger's egg crates, 1910-20, used to transport eggs to NYC.

Beef Production:

Daniel Drew is likely the most infamous cattle producer, as he allegedly fed his cattle salt just prior to their sale, so they would drink copious amount of water and weigh in at a higher rate. He is mentioned several times in Pelletreau's 1886 *History of Putnam County*.

<https://archive.org/details/historyofputnamc00pell/page/690>, though in 1910, his son refuted these claims in an editorial in the Putnam County Courier:

<https://news.hrvh.org/veridian/?a=d&d=idaibcdj19100429.1.1&srpos=2&e=-----en-20-idaibcdj-1--txt-txIN-daniel+drew+cattle----->



Ryder Farm is a local Brewster, NY farm that has successfully transitioned to 21st century agriculture and has been in the Ryder family since the late 18th century.

Ryder Farm has a community supported agriculture program and farm stand, as well as a visiting residency program for theater performance artists.

Impact of World War II:

Putnam County Courier cartoon, January 1945, where the older generation is planning their agricultural layout in the absence of the “boys.”



School release mandated for student labor on farms during World War II:

<https://cdm16694.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/cphpl/id/488/rec/13>

Photos from the Salinger family of the Brewster Grange events, ca. 1946. The Grange was an agricultural advocacy organization active regionally and nationally. Many towns had a chapter, did yours?



Bees on Sedum blossoms, September 2019, Southeast, NY—in beekeeping, a dearth is a period when there is a shortage of nectar either because of the end of the season as pollen producing flowers die back or brought on by drought. Bees will become louder, more aggressive, and will rob other hives' honey, if they are left open, to cope with the shortages and feed their own hive members. Sedum is a late blooming flower we have planted in our garden to help bees during the seasonal transition.



Cultural representations of the harvest:

Seasonal cycles in poetry/greeting card in Locust Grove's collection:

<https://cdm16694.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/locustgrove/id/321/rec/1>

Scarecrows in popular commercial imagery in 19th century Christmas card at Locust Grove:

<https://cdm16694.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/locustgrove/id/256/rec/4>

By the mid-nineteenth century, chromolithography provided colorful trade cards, post cards, and greeting cards in a time when people wrote letters to one another much more frequently than most people do today. Thanksgiving was a popular theme, linked as it is to the harvest and agricultural cycle from history. Here's an example of late 19th-early 20th century post card:



This post card was postmarked in Dykemans, NY on November 24, 1908 and sent to Mr. C. H. Brown in Farmers Mills, NY, though no note was written and the sender is unknown.



A scarecrow from current popular culture in front of a pre-school in Kent/Carmel, NY. When removed from their original context of guarding fields during the harvest from crows and other birds, scarecrows have become a ubiquitous, if homogenized sign of Autumn.

The Harvest—as fall festival, dance, sale, the site of community gathering and celebration:



Poughkeepsie Evening Enterprise, Sept. 12, 1903, p. 10. Retailer Luckey, Platt & Company. Retailers used the harvest as a draw for customers, trying to tap into farm family's cash flow from the annual sale of their crops.

THE LAST DAY

---OF---

LUCKEY, PLATT & CO.'S

Great Harvest Sale of 1903.

ALL DAY AND ALL EVENING.

Everything is in readiness to accommodate all who have delayed until the last moment, or who want more of this or that while the prices are still down in every department.

These remarkable offers of the last two weeks will remain OPEN until the bell sounds Tonight and the great sale closes.

Store Bright as Day Tonight, to give an opportunity to all who cannot come by day.

Money to be Saved All Over Our Store by Buying Today.

LUCKEY, PLATT & CO.