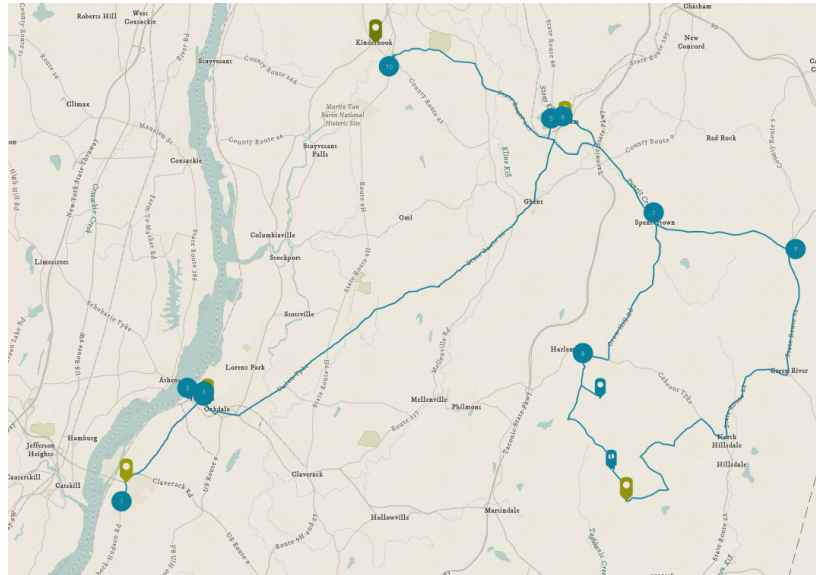


Arts & Letters:

A Creative Legacy in Columbia County

Throughout its history, Columbia County has been a sanctuary for artists, writers, performers and creatives of all kinds seeking inspiration. In 2014, a study showed Hudson to have the third-highest concentration of independent artists in the nation, ranked only behind Brooklyn and Taos, New Mexico. But Hudson is just one of many creative destinations in the County. From the mountain views that were immortalized by Hudson River School painters to the idyllic Austerlitz berry farm where poet Edna St. Vincent Millay lived and wrote, creative energy flows through every part of Columbia County—a legacy that continues today at venues as diverse as **Art Omi**, **PS21** and **Time & Space Limited**.



Road Trip Stops:

- 1 Olana State Historic Site
- 2 South Bay Hudson
- 3 Hudson Hall
- 4 John Ashbery's Hudson House
- 5 Chatham Public Library
- 6 Ellsworth Kelly's Art Studio
- 7 Spencertown
- 8 Writers of Harlemville & Hillsdale
- 9 Steepletop (home of Edna St. Vincent Millay)
- 10 Luykas Van Alen House

1 Olana State Historic Site

5720 State Route 9G, Hudson

Perched high above the Hudson River with magnificent Catskill Mountain views, Olana was the home of Frederic Edwin Church (1826–1900), one of the most celebrated painters of the Hudson River School, America’s first original art movement.

As a young man, Church traveled to Catskill from his native Connecticut to study under Thomas Cole, who is considered the founding father of the Hudson River School. The budding painter would cross the river to sketch the mountains from a favorite hillside vantage point just outside of Hudson; years later, he would purchase that land and build his masterpiece—Olana.

Church collaborated with architect Calvert Vaux to design Olana, which was inspired by Church’s travels in the Middle East; the home was likely named after an ancient Persian fortress city on the Araxes River that overlooked Mount Ararat. The Church family moved into Olana in 1872, but the extensive decorative detailing—including intricate stenciling—would take several more years to complete.

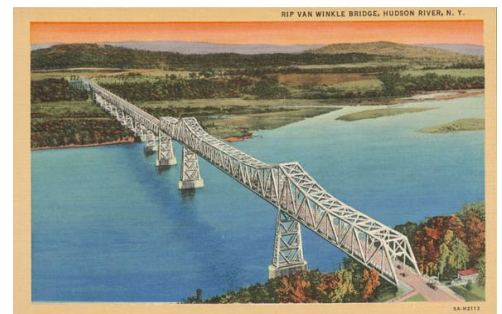
Walk the extensive trails (free of charge) to see the views that inspired Church throughout this career. Inside, you’ll see the home as it looked in the 1890s, filled with paintings, *objets d’art* and furnishings that Frederic and Isabel Church collected on their many vacations abroad. **Note:** Please contact Olana State Historic Site for current openings and accessibility.

Local Attraction: The **Hudson River Skywalk** offers a glimpse into the landscapes that inspired so many Hudson River School painters. The three-mile pedestrian trail (six miles round trip) follows the Rip Van Winkle Bridge from Olana State Historic Site to the **Thomas Cole National Historic Site** (218 Spring Street, Catskill), where Frederic Church studied painting under Hudson River School founder Thomas Cole.

Follow NY-9G N; at the traffic circle, take the first exit onto NY-23 E/NY-9G N, then follow signs to stay on NY-23 E/NY-9G N. In 2.7 miles, turn left onto Allen Street and follow until it dead ends at Front Street. Turn left, then make an immediate right onto Ferry Street. Turn left onto Water Street.



Olana, vintage postcard from the CCHS Collection.



Rip Van Winkle Bridge, vintage postcard from the CCHS Collection.

② South Bay Hudson

Henry Hudson Riverfront Park, Water Street, Hudson

Another noted artist of the Hudson River School, **Sanford Robinson Gifford** (1823–1880) grew up in Hudson and drew much inspiration from his hometown’s river landscapes. In fact, it has been said that he made the decision to become a landscape painter on the summit of Mount Merino—a view he captured in numerous paintings.

The Hudson of Gifford’s young adulthood was one of rapid industrialization. His father, Elihu Gifford, played an important role in this transformation, co-founding the Hudson Iron Company in Hudson’s South Bay in 1849. Gifford’s childhood home, now lost, was on Columbia Street—another part of town that would become heavily industrial during Gifford’s lifetime.

Though many of Gifford’s favorite vantage points are no longer accessible due to the construction of the railroad and NY-9G, you can still get an inspiring glimpse of Mount Merino from Henry Hudson Riverfront Park, which offers a similar view as seen in Gifford’s iconic *South Bay, on the Hudson, near Hudson, New York*, from 1864. Hudson-born painter **Henry Ary**, another member of the Hudson River School, also favored this view. Notably, Gifford’s paintings of South Bay totally omit the industrial structures that came to dominate the landscape.

Return to Front Street and turn left, then make a right onto Warren Street. In .4 miles, your destination will be on the right.

③ Hudson Hall

327 Warren Street, Hudson

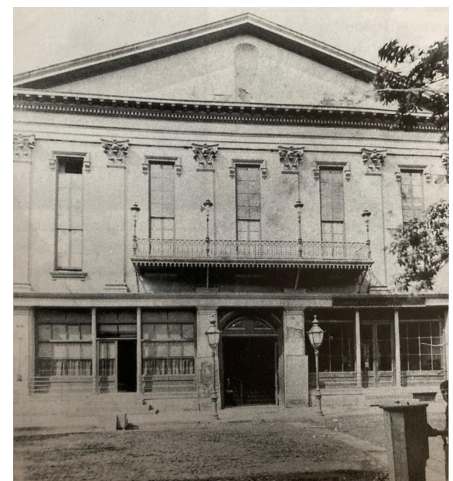
The mid 1800s were a cultural golden age for Hudson and Columbia County. This building, which broke ground in 1854, was Hudson’s first city hall, but was built to include a performance and lecture space on the upper level—officially making it New York State’s oldest surviving theater. The venue hosted some of the preeminent thinkers of the day, including poet Bret Harte and abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher; Ralph Waldo Emerson was scheduled to speak on February 9, 1855, but a snowstorm prevented him from traveling to Hudson. Frederic Church and Sanford Gifford both exhibited artwork here. Susan B. Anthony is known to have visited three times, and “Blind Tom” Wiggins is among the musicians who entertained early audiences.



Sanford Robinson Gifford. *South Bay, on the Hudson, near Hudson, New York*. Oil on canvas, 1864, 12 ½ x 25 ½ in. Source: hudsonriverschool.org



“Hudson River, South from Hudson Showing Mt. Merino and the Catskill Mountains.” Vintage postcard from the CCHS Collection.



Hudson Hall shortly after it was built. Archival photograph.

By the 1880s, the building started to go by the moniker of “opera house,” though according to a 2004 issue of *Columbia County History & Heritage* magazine, precious little operatic music was ever performed here. This was part of a Gilded Age trend wherein upwardly mobile places such as Hudson put forth a somewhat dubious image of grandeur, which the *Rochester Democrat* lampooned as follows: “*Why are there so many opera houses and so few theaters, particularly as there is not one opera house out of a dozen that knows the difference between opera and a small beer!*” In the early 20th century, trial runs of plays destined for Broadway are said to have been staged here, featuring performers such as Milton Berle, Pearl Bailey and Bing Crosby. The upstairs performance hall closed in the 1940s, and the building later sold to the Moose Lodge in 1962, after the city offices had moved to their new location. In 2017, after a period of abandonment, a long-awaited restoration was completed and the venue was once again opened to the public as a performance venue, now called Hudson Hall.

Local Attraction: In addition to Frederic Church and Sanford Gifford, many other noted artists lived and worked in Hudson, including Henry Ary, Ira C. Goodell and George McKinstry. Explore their old stomping ground on a stroll down **Warren Street**, which is now an international destination for arts and culture. Premium auction houses like **Stair Gallery**, high-end art galleries such as **Carrie Haddad Gallery**, funky antique shops like **Magic Hill** and independent art spaces like **Time & Space Ltd.** offer something for every taste. Bonus points if you can score an original work by **Earl Swanigan** (1964–2019), a prolific outsider artist who called Hudson home. Grab artisan sandwiches from **Cascades** (407 Warren Street) or assemble a smorgasbord of local foods and imported delicacies from **Olde Hudson** (449 Warren Street) for a *plein air* picnic.

Turn right onto City Hall Place, then turn left onto Union Street. Turn right onto W. Court Street, then your destination will be on the right in 200 feet.

④ John Ashbery’s Hudson House

39 West Court Street, Hudson

NOTE: This is a private home. Please do not trespass or disturb the owners in any way.

John Ashbery (1927–2017) was one of the most esteemed and influential poets of the 20th century, and served as poet laureate of New York State from 2001 to 2003. A native of Rochester and a graduate of Harvard College, Ashbery found

himself at the center of the literary and cultural circles of Paris and New York City from the 1950s through the 1970s. In 1978 he purchased this c.1895 Hudson home, which he spent the next 15 years restoring. An avid collector, Ashbery filled the home with an eclectic assortment of art, furniture and objects. During this time, he also taught at Bard College.

After his death in 2017, many of Ashbery's belongings were donated to museum and library collections, including the Houghton Library at Yale, which has created a virtual tour experience that includes audio excerpts of Ashbery reading his poems. You can view it [here](#).

Head northeast on W. Court Street toward Partition Street. Turn right onto Union Street, then turn left onto 7th Street. Make a right on Columbia Street, which will become NY-66 N. Follow NY-66 N for 12 miles. Once you reach Chatham, turn left onto Church Street, then turn right onto Woodbridge Avenue. In .3 miles, your destination will be on the right.

5 Chatham Public Library

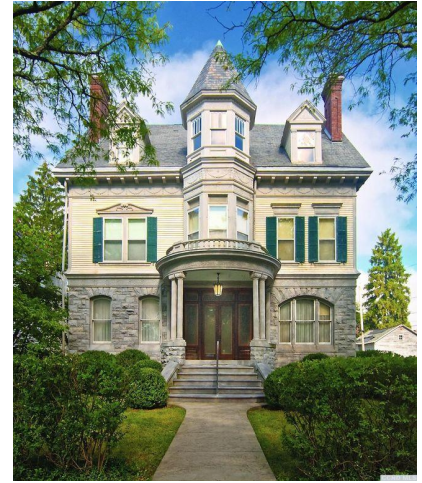
11 Woodbridge Avenue, Chatham

In Columbia County, artistic treasures are often found in unlikely places. As a case in point, the Chatham Public Library is home to an authentic Tiffany window which dates to 1912. By that year, Louis Comfort Tiffany had grown his Tiffany Studios into one of the most esteemed glass makers in the world, and the Tiffany lamp was a fixture of upper-class American homes.

The Chatham Public Library, built in a Beaux Arts style between 1903 and 1905, came about thanks to three men: Dr. John Wheeler, William Howland and Andrew Carnegie. Wheeler and Howland were local civic leaders and education advocates who envisioned a library for Chatham that would serve the local school and be open to the community year round. At Wheeler's urging, Howland wrote a letter explaining this vision to Andrew Carnegie; intrigued by the idea, the famously philanthropic billionaire provided a \$15,000 grant to build the library.

Dr. Wheeler died in 1908 at the age of 68. One year later, his wife, Gertrude, donated a memorial Tiffany window to the library he helped establish. Titled *Instruction*, the window remains in a place of honor on the library's upper level.

Continue on Woodbridge Avenue then turn right onto Kinderhook Street. In .3 miles, turn right onto Park Row, then make a left onto Main Street. Your destination will be on the right in 300 feet.



John Ashbery's Hudson House.
Source: CCND MLS.



Vintage postcard of Chatham Public Library. CCHS Collection.



Detail view of *Instruction*, Tiffany window at Chatham Public Library.

Source:

[Facebook.com/ChathamNYPublicLibrary](https://www.facebook.com/ChathamNYPublicLibrary)

6 Ellsworth Kelly's Art Studio

13 Main Street, Chatham

Make your way to 13 Main Street in Chatham Village, then look up: the second floor, with its quartet of tall, skinny windows, once served as the art studio of seminal modernist painter Ellsworth Kelly.

Kelly, who was born in Newburgh, N.Y. and raised in New Jersey, decamped to Spencertown from New York City in 1970, setting up shop at this studio shortly thereafter. Here, he created 14 paintings that came to be known as the The Chatham Series—the first works Kelly created after leaving Manhattan. To accompany a recent exhibit of these works at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, the gallery published an article that included this account of how Kelly found the space:

"Kelly's studio in Chatham was in a 19th-century brick building featuring nearly 12-foot-tall windows along its upper floor. After spying the striking windows from the sidewalk while exploring the town, Kelly entered the barber shop on the ground floor of the building to inquire about the space and learned that, after stints as an opera house, banquet hall, roller rink, and more, it was functioning as a storage space, holding the town's Christmas lights. The barber and a neighboring shopkeeper co-owned the space, and they agreed to rent it out to Kelly for \$50 a month. The space was far more spacious than any studio Kelly has previous (sic) occupied, and the isolated location allowed him to explore his ideas without external influence."

Local Attraction: Even if you don't have the budget for an original Ellsworth Kelly, you can pop into **Pookstyle** (15 Main Street) next door to the artist's former studio to shop art, home goods, gifts, and perhaps even some Ellsworth Kelly-themed items.

Head northeast on Main Street, and at the traffic circle, take the first exit onto River Street. Keep right to continue on Austerlitz Street. In .5 miles, continue on Hogel Hill Road. In .7 miles, turn left onto NY-203 S. You will arrive in Spencertown in 2.8 miles.

7 Spencertown

NY-203 at South Street

Ellsworth Kelly lived in quaint Spencertown from 1970 until his death in 2015 at age 92. His is just one facet of Spencertown's long artistic legacy. **Spencertown Academy Arts Center** (790 Route 203, Spencertown) is a community space devoted to



Ellsworth Kelly outside of his art studio on Main Street in Chatham Village.

Source: [Moma.org](https://www.moma.org)



Ellsworth Kelly postage stamps.

Source: USPS.

public arts programming, and is located inside one of the nation's first co-educational teacher training colleges, established 1847. Currently, the center hosts a mix of in-person art exhibitions and virtual events, including the **Festival of Books** in mid October.

Local Attraction: If you are visiting on a Saturday or Sunday, explore the otherworldly grounds of **Taconic Sculpture Park** (194 Stever Hill Road) before departing Spencertown. Over 30 years, artist Roy Kanwit has created larger-than-life, mythological sculptures from materials such as marble and limestone. The sculptures dot a three-acre plot of hillside overlooking the Taconic State Parkway. **Note:** Operating hours may vary, so check with the business before your visit.

Make a slight right onto South Street, then continue onto Crow Hill Road. In 3.4 miles, turn right onto County Route 21. Then, in .6 miles, turn left onto Harlemville Road. Your destination will be on the right in .3 miles.

8 Writers of Harlemville & Hillsdale

Begin at 753 Harlemville Road

NOTE: These are private homes. Please do not trespass or disturb the owners in any way.

With its undulating hills, sweeping views and enviable privacy, the remote area of Harlemville and Hillsdale became something of a mecca for writers and bohemians in the early 20th century. English-born novelist, philosopher, poet and literary critic **John Cowper Powys** (1872–1963) resided for several years in the early 1930s at a c.1904 home he named **Phudd Bottom** (753 Harlemville Road). Before moving to Hillsdale, Powys and his partner, Phyllis Playter, were fixtures of the Greenwich Village cultural scene, counting icons such as Isadora Duncan and Thomas Wolfe as members of their social circle. A noted writer on man's relationship with nature, Powys wrote and published *A Glastonbury Romance* (1932) and *Autobiography* (1934) during his time in Harlemville.

Continue south on Harlemville Road, then make a left onto Phudd Hill Road to see **Hardhack** (160 Phudd Hill Road), the former home of poet **Arthur Davison Ficke** (1883–1945). A friend of Powys' and a renowned sonnetist who also experimented with modern poetry, Ficke was a longtime lover of Edna St. Vincent Millay (whose Austerlitz home is featured later on this itinerary). His wife, Gladys Brown Ficke, was a writer and artist in her own right.

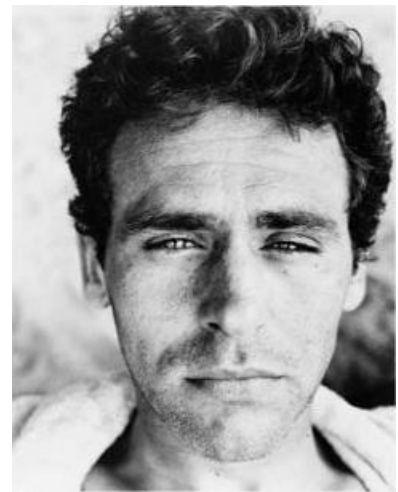


Historic photograph of Spencertown Academy Arts Center. Source: SpencertownAcademy.org



Top: John Cowper Powys. Source: Wikipedia. **Bottom:** Arthur Davison Ficke, 1940, by Carl Van Vechten. Source: Library of Congress

Return to Harlemlville Road, make a left, and then hang another left onto Wolf Hill Road; in about a mile and a half, turn right onto Rodman Road to explore the former stomping ground of novelist, screenwriter and film critic **James Agee** (1909–1955). Another Greenwich Village exile, Agee purchased a 130-acre farm in Hillsdale in 1948 for a peaceful summer retreat he said reminded him of his boyhood home in Tennessee. He wrote many American classics during his short creative life, including screenplays for the films *The African Queen* (1951) and *The Night of the Hunter* (1955), and his acclaimed novel *A Death in the Family* (1957), which he wrote during his time in Hillsdale and for which he was posthumously awarded a Pulitzer Prize. Upon his death in 1955 from a heart attack, Agee was buried at his beloved Hillsdale farm.



James Agee, 1937, by Walker Evans.
Source: [Library of Congress](#)

Local Attraction: Continue on Rodman Road to **Rodgers Book Barn** (467 Rodman Road), a used book store that is as stuffed with character as it is books. Maureen Rodgers, a former Manhattan book dealer, opened the shop in 1972, and has since accrued approximately 50,000 books. Browse the shelves inside and out to see if you can find a volume by one of these Columbia County authors.

Head east on Rodman Road, then make a slight right onto Pumpkin Hill Road. Travel for 1.3 miles, then turn left onto Whippoorwill Road. In 1.3 miles, turn right onto Wolf Hill Road. In 1.1 miles, turn right onto Hunt Road, then in another 1.1 miles, turn right onto County Road 21. In 1 mile, sharp left onto NY-22. Travel for 6.7 miles, then turn right onto E. Hill Road NOTE: *Along this route you will pass several excellent arts destinations, including the Circle Museum (11111-11373 NY-22) and Art Austerlitz (11608 NY-22).*

9 Steepletop

44 East Hill Road, Austerlitz

NOTE: Steepletop is currently closed to the public.

Edna St. Vincent Millay was one of America's most celebrated poets, and won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1923. She married that same year, and two years later she and her husband, Eugene, bought an abandoned berry farm in Austerlitz encompassing a farmhouse, outbuildings and around 700 acres of pristine land. Abandoning her fast-paced city life, she said: "I cannot write in New York. It is awfully exciting there and I find lots of things to write about and I accumulate many ideas, but I have to go away where it is quiet."

Raised in eastern Maine and educated at Vassar, Millay was no stranger to small-town, rural life. She threw herself into



Steepletop, the Austerlitz home of Edna St. Vincent Millay. Source: [Millay.org](#)

gardening, creating enchanting garden rooms from the stone foundations of an old barn, including rose and iris gardens, a badminton court and a spring-fed swimming pool which was the scene for many a raucous party with her New York society friends. Millay died in 1950, and her ashes were later interred at Steepletop along with her husband, mother, sister and other family members.

Return to NY-22 N, and turn right; in .2 miles, turn left onto NY-203 N. Follow NY-203 N for 11.5 miles. Turn left onto McCagg Road. In 2.4 miles, continue on Hudson Avenue in Kinderhook. Follow signs to take NY-9H S, turning right onto the ramp. Follow NY-9H S for .8 miles, and your destination will be on the right.

10 1737 Luykas Van Alen House

2589 NY-9H, Kinderhook

For a short period in 1809, iconic American writer Washington Irving boarded at the Kinderhook mansion of Judge William P. Van Ness—the same house that Martin Van Buren would later purchase and rename Lindenwald. Irving came here in mourning after the tragic death of his young fiancée, Matilda, but it was to be the beginning of a fruitful literary period for the New Yorker. He immersed himself in the local Dutch culture, which helped him complete his first major literary success: *A Knickerbocker's History of New York, from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty* (1809). He also gathered inspiration for two smash hits he would publish a decade later: *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (both 1819).

As the Luykas Van Alen House is just a short walk from the Van Ness house where Irving boarded, it is widely believed to be a primary model for the Van Tassel House in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. (Descriptions of the Van Tassel House in the story also match with the interior floor plan of the Van Alen House). Irving is believed to have based some of his characters from *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* on local Kinderhook residents as well. Brom Bones may have been based on a local boy named Abram Van Alstyne. Most famous of all, Ichabod Crane was largely inspired by Jesse Merwin, the local schoolmaster whom Irving befriended during his time in Kinderhook. The two remained lifelong friends, corresponding until Merwin's death in 1952. On one of these letters, Irving made the inscription: "From the original Ichabod Crane."

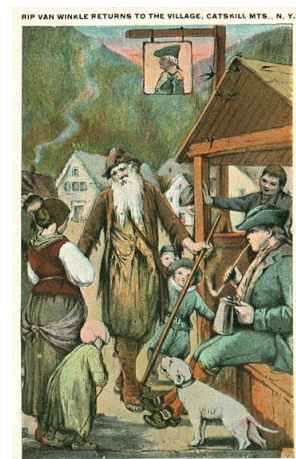
Local Attraction: It may seem an unexpected place to view fine art, but the Kinderhook branch of **Community Bank** (1 Hudson Street) displays a painting by artist **Samantha Littlefield**



Edna St. Vincent Millay, as photographed by Carl Van Vechten in 1933. Source: [Library of Congress](https://www.loc.gov/).



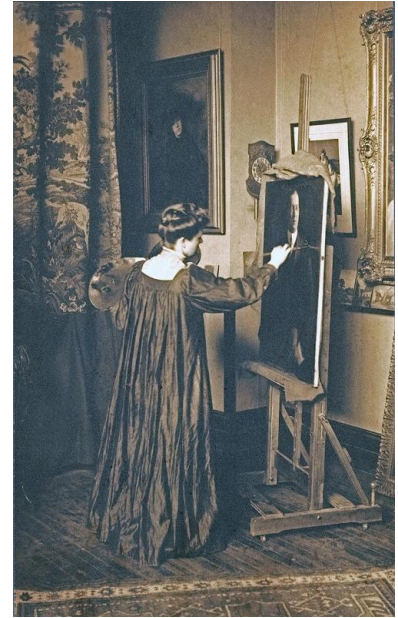
1737 Luykas Van Alen House. CCHS Collection.



Vintage postcard portraying Washington Irving's Rip Van Winkle. CCHS Collection.

Huntley (1865–1849). Primarily a portraitist, Huntley hailed from Troy and plied her trade for a time in Columbia County. She studied in Paris under Jules Lefebvre and Eugène Grasset, fighting against the gender expectations of the day in search of the honest criticism she desired. She later taught at the Emma Willard School in Buffalo, and had studios in Albany, Rochester and Madison, Wisconsin. She painted several notable people in the course of her career, and you can find her painting of Governor Martin H. Glynn in the lobby of the municipal building that bears his name in Valatie (3211 Church Street, Valatie).

While you're in Kinderhook, check to see what's on view at **The School** (25 Broad Street), a cutting-edge art space housed in a former school from one of New York City's most renowned gallerists, **Jack Shainman**.



Samantha Littlefield Huntley in her studio, Troy, New York. Platinum print, 1909. Gift of Elizabeth Loss, 2005.28.1. CCHS Collection.

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