

MILLBROOK HIGH SCHOOL

A Dutchess County Memorial to Jonathan Thorne.

THE LEATHER MERCHANT'S CAREER

A Long Life of Business Prosperity in New-York City—His Stock Farm and Summer Home.

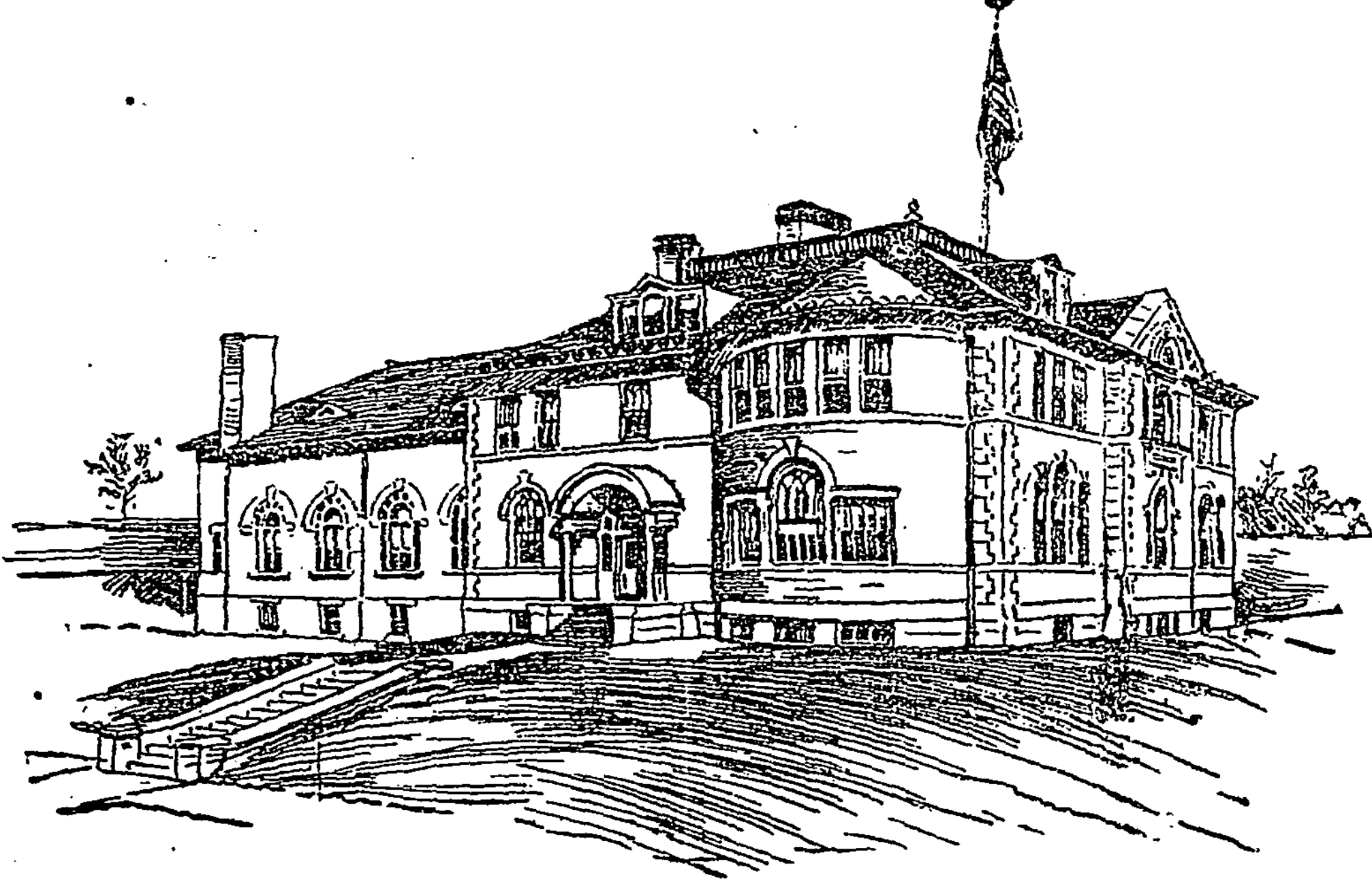
Dutchess County has been peculiarly favored by nature, and her social conditions have been promoted by philanthropic enterprises.

The foundation of Vassar College for women at Poughkeepsie was an early and noted expression of the desire of her citizens to aid in the advancement of education, and now the establishment of the Thorne Memorial Hall and High School at Millbrook will add to the county's fame as an educational centre. The building, which was recently completed, was erected by Samuel, Jonathan, Jr., William, and Phebe Anna Thorne "just as a memorial" to their

a member of the Board of Directors of the New-York Mutual Gas Light Company, a trustee of the Central Trust Company from its first organization, a director of the Fifth Avenue Bank, the City Fire Insurance Company, and the Sixth Avenue Railroad Company; Vice President of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and a Governor of the New-York Hospital. He was one of the original promoters of the Pennsylvania Coal Company and its leading director until a few years previous to his death. It is not too much to say that he played a man's part in the actual work of American life.

The death of Mr. Thorne's father in 1849 had left the old homestead at Millbrook in his hands. He at once had it fitted up as a Summer residence, and in 1850 he built the house now standing on this Thornedale property. The abiding charm of Millbrook is attested in his exclusive fondness for this Summer home. It was another centre from which his influence radiated with notably advantageous effect. When he inherited this fine, large farm in Dutchess County he began to make important improvements, and proceeded to stock it with the choicest kind of cattle to be found in the world. The finest cattle which money could procure were brought by his agent from England, a number of animals having been obtained from the Bates herd of short-horned Durhams, famous throughout the United Kingdom, for which prices were paid that at that time were considered enormous. The bull Grand Duke cost \$1,000 and Duchess cows \$600 each.

A man who was associated in business with Mr. Thorne for many years says he never in that time heard a harsh or angry word spoken by him. His manner was gentle, courteous, and dignified. He was at the same time a man of marked character, possessed of great executive ability and a rigid sense of justice that exacted from others such integrity of action as his own. He was esteemed for liberal hospitality and



The Thorne Memorial Hall and High School. Erected in Memory of Jonathan and Lydia A. Thorne by Their Children.

parents, Jonathan and Lydia A. Thorne. The cost of the structure was over \$100,000. The building is fire-proof. It is built of straw-colored brick and white marble. It is classic in design, and is so arranged as to answer the educational and social needs of the village. It is in the form of a cross, with east and west fronts, its greatest dimensions being nearly 100 by 200 feet.

The entrance to the part devoted to the school is on the east side, and is reached by a double flight of steps, covered by a porch. At the west side is a porte cochere which gives entrance to the main hall and to a vestibule leading to an auditorium capable of seating several hundred persons. The western end of the building will be devoted to special school celebrations, village fairs, horticultural exhibitions, lectures, balls, and other festivities. It is completely arranged for theatrical productions.

The first story of the school building contains several large classrooms and smaller rooms. A large assembly room, providing, among other uses, for morning devotional exercises, is on the floor above.

In another section of the building provision is made for a library. A ladies' reception room, which may be used by societies conducting the village charities, &c., and also for teachers' meetings, is an additional feature in this structure, in which apparently no interest of the people has been forgotten. The basement comprises a great playroom for the use of school children in unpleasant weather. The janitor and his family have apartments in the attic. The interior of the building is handsomely finished in oak, and the main hall contains a beautiful dedicatory bronze tablet. In addition to the names of Jonathan and Lydia A. Thorne, with the dates 1801-1884 and 1805-1872, indicating the life limits of the honored couple, the inscription further shows that the building was erected by their children for the promotion of the educational interests of the people.

Jonathan Thorne was a thoroughgoing man of commanding influence, and he was very greatly respected in Millbrook, where his Summer residence was maintained, and in New-York during his business career of fifty years, in which he amassed a fortune of several millions. He was a mere lad when his father, Samuel Thorne, a country merchant at Washington, Dutchess County, purchased several hundred acres of land at Millbrook, where he established his family with the idea of educating the boy as a farmer. His ancestors all belonged to the Society of Friends. His great-grandfather, Isaac Thorne, was one of the earliest settlers in the county. After six years of life on the Millbrook farm, Jonathan Thorne, then nineteen years old, declared an unhesitating preference for mercantile activity. He was established in 1820 as a down-town dealer in dry goods in New-York City. Within three years he married Miss Lydia A., the daughter of Israel Corse, a leather merchant in "the Swamp." He took his bride of seventeen to the Millbrook homestead, his father having persuaded him to sell out his city business. For several years he remained in charge of the large farm, and was noted for his successful stock raising. He returned in 1830 to New-York and entered into partnership with the firm in which his father-in-law had long been chief. After successive changes, the firm was finally reorganized in 1847 under the style of Thorne, Watson, Corse & Co., and so continued until 1880, when Mr. Thorne retired.

In the conduct of his great business at Jacob and Ferry Streets, in New-York, and his immense tanneries in New-York and Pennsylvania, the golden rule, "do unto others as you would have others do unto you," was undeviatingly applied.

Under the custom in the wholesale hide and leather business previous to his connection with the trade, the stock bought in the gross was graded into first, second, and third classes, and rejections, the last of course being least valuable. The grader followed the idea of giving the firm the benefit of all doubts in case of uncertainty in the sorting as to whether a hide should be thrown into one pile or another. This custom was completely reversed by Mr. Thorne, who insisted that the customer and not he should receive the benefit of the doubt. His scrupulous conscientiousness promised, it was thought, a great loss, but it had a precisely opposite effect. His customers were not long in finding out that his rejections were of more value than those of any other house, while the highest market prices were obtained for the regular grades. Such was the sterling honesty which characterized all his methods that he was enabled to build up the largest trade in hides on this continent.

In the latter part of his life Mr. Thorne earned the gratitude of the trade by his services and sacrifices in defending their interests in the celebrated "tan burning suit" that was continued for more than fourteen years. He expended a large amount of money on behalf of the tanners, the final decision of the United States Supreme Court being given in his favor a few months before his death. By the contribution of special capital he several times assisted in the formation of other business houses, always exercising much good judgment in such cases and thereby adding to his own fortune, while assisting young and deserving men.

For about a quarter of a century the residence of Mr. Thorne was in Washington Square, and later at 524 Fifth Avenue for the remainder of his life. He had a habit in the early days of his business life of going to his office in "the Swamp" before breakfast and drawing checks for all obligations falling due on that day. In addition to the care of his vast business, he was identified with many liberal interests, though personally inclined to keep in the background as much as possible. He was a member of the organization of Friends, whose meeting house is in Fifteenth Street, and so continued to the day of his death. He was a Director in the Leather Manufacturers' National Bank for forty-seven years. For many years also he was

agreeable manners, and for his widely known wisdom and uprightness in business life.

His finely proportioned, erect figure is also well remembered by old New-York merchants. He was active in outdoor exercise almost to the end of his long life. After the death of his first wife he married Mrs. Eliza Fox Merritt, a sister of Mrs. Augustus Schell, who survived him. In his domestic relations he was altogether happy. He was blessed with unusually good health until a few weeks before his death, in his eighty-fourth year. On the day of his funeral the stores in "the Swamp" were closed.

The Thornedale estate is in the hands of Oakleigh Thorne, a son of Edwin, the eldest of Mr. Jonathan Thorne's several sons. It retains the prestige given it by the former enterprising proprietor, who stocked it with a costly herd. The fine dairy in connection is widely celebrated.

The home of Mr. Samuel Thorne, one of the donors of the school building, is among the most beautiful near Millbrook. The proprietor has established a fine series of greenhouses, and has a fancy for cultivating all varieties of lilies in his ponds.

The charms of the Millbrook scenery are endless, the foreground, with hills and dales, merging into more distant hills—one range after another, and the high peaks of the Ramapo Highlands, Storm King, Shawangunk, Catskills, Hilderbergs, Berkshires, and, on very clear days, in the Green Mountains, rising in a background of blue and purple.

The memorial building provides the high school department for three districts. Some of the people living near it have recently moved into the neighborhood to avail themselves of its advantages.