

An Archaeology of Anaesthesia

Jeff Benjamin

Originally written as proposal for Lindt Dissertation Fellowship

What kinds of sensory adjustments allowed human beings to industrialize? If we accept Lewis Mumford's proposition that the era of iron, steel and carbon fuel production was accompanied by a broad scale "starvation of the senses" (Mumford 1934, 180), then what is the material evidence of this sensory suppression or deferral? What is the material culture of feeling – or rather, unfeeling – that accompanied the arrival of the Anthropocene?

One of the implications of this question is to suggest that the process of anaesthetization that escorted Americans into industrial life has simply continued in different forms, but without the belief in industrial 'progress' to give it context or meaning. Social forms of industrialism endure within a void of purpose; this gives the imperative of anaesthetization renewed fuel as a buffer for the looming climate catastrophe. Orphans of the industrial project perpetuate the ongoing project of desensitization with devastating results: the opioid epidemic claimed 47,000 American lives in 2017 (Center for Disease Control, 2018). The archaeological evidence unearthed during my recent investigations at Whiteport, New York, suggests that the impulse towards anaesthetization has roots that extend into the origins of industrial society itself.

Archaeology has the propensity to collapse time; to bring researchers into direct contact with the time periods of the objects and sites being researched. In a certain sense, artifacts carry their respective temporalities with them, causing the archaeologist him or herself to live in a temporal space consisting of multiple textures, paces, horizons. For this reason, archaeology can bring the past into the heart of the present, and archaeological finds are often relevant to contemporary narratives and concerns.

Sensation, emotion and feeling warrant a constant archaeological attentiveness and vigilance, and their particular manifestations upon the landscape and within the individual are often unambiguous and exact. This is particularly true within landscapes of rapid industrial expansion where one can find ample evidence for the valorization of anesthetization. The testimonial evidence that describes a peculiar "dull sense of denial and distress" (Phelps 1983 [1871], 96) inaugurated by industrialization delineates this precision of feeling and the imperative to assuage it. As observed by Buck-Morss, specifically referencing opium-based patent medicines in the nineteenth century: "Drug addiction is characteristic of modernity. It is the correlate and counterpart of shock" (Buck-Morss 1992, 21). This dissertation is working under the premise that feelings, sensations and emotions are unquantifiable accuracies. However, the imperative for their suppression within industrial contexts has left tangible material evidence scattered across the landscape.

As a representative location of industrialization (in this case natural cement production) I have chosen as a research site the town of Whiteport, New York, founded in 1836, in the Rosendale Cement mining district. Historical documentation offers strong evidence for a radical sensory adjustment for the workers who came in the early to mid 1800's to the region to mine, burn and refine the limestone in cement production as well as build and maintain the Delaware and Hudson Canal. The rapid industrialization of the area was contingent on numerous factors, one of which was the industrializing individual him or herself, and their capacity to adapt to these changing conditions. Newspaper articles relating mining accidents and advertisements for potions and remedies of various kinds attest to a daily existence where pain, mortality and accidental death was a constant presence. Among this evidence are numerous examples of advertisements for cures for a host of lung ailments, such as "catarrh." The 1855 state census of New York attributes several lung related illnesses (such as whooping cough and consumption) as the leading causes of death. In conjunction with this evidence are numerous accounts of the omnipresence of airborne particulates, the dust and smoke within and around Rosendale and vicinity. A graveyard directly above the mine entrance at the Snyder Estate in Rosendale is the resting place for several children, most of whom died very young in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

The Rosendale cement mining district, centered around Rosendale, New York, and extending along a sixty mile length of the Rondout Creek near Kingston, New York, developed quickly in the early decades of the nineteenth century as the country's internal canal infrastructure demanded a source of hydraulic "natural" cement for mortar, which sets and remains hard under water. Following this discovery, the area saw a rapid population increase with immigrant communities from England, Ireland, Finland, Sweden, Germany, Slovenia, Croatia, Italy and many other places. Once Portland cement was developed around 1900, Rosendale cement production disappeared as quickly as it arrived.

Continued on page 4

The Century House Historical Society

668 Route 213, P.O. Box 150
Rosendale, New York 12472-0150
info@centuryhouse.org 845-658-9900

www.CenturyHouse.org
Friend us on Facebook!

Officers

President – Henry Lowengard
Vice-President – Michael McCabe
Secretary – Laurel Mutti
Treasurer – Althea Werner

Board of Trustees

Jeffrey Benjamin	Bill Merchant
David Kime	Laurel Mutti
Bill Kraemer	Steven Schimmrich
Henry Lowengard	Althea Werner
Michael McCabe	

Copyright © 2021

A Message from the President



Greeting, members and friends of the Century House Historical Society. It's been a while since I've been able to address you, so here's a belated update on the goings on at the Snyder Estate.

This year managed to end, and the less said about it, the better. Nevertheless, as with nearly all public museums and arts venues, changes that came about to accommodate the pandemic will persist even when gatherings and just

sharing the same air will be acceptably risk-free. As official pandemic responses went from lax to cautious throughout 2021, here were (and are) the general rules in play for 2022:

- Visiting the Estate will still mean observing all the current State and County rules pertaining to crowd sizes, social distancing, mask wearing, hand washing etc. that should be familiar to all. We'll update these rules on website as they change.
- The Museum was more or less open in 2021. It doesn't have the air circulation for big crowds, but small groups were let in since mostly that's what we get. I expect roughly the same conditions in 2022. If you're doing research and need access to items in the museum or archives, contact us and we'll try to accommodate!

- The grounds will have a docent on Sundays 1 to 4 pm, during the usual season of Mother's Day to Labor Day. The carriage house will be open, and we'll be bringing a few of them out as we've been doing.
- The Widow Jane Mine will be open as well, as are the other estate grounds.
- There are large maps of the self guided tour placed on the entrance kiosk and near the Mine itself.
- Please Please Please stay on Estate property and do not explore the ruins and mines on the adjoining Iron Mountain property. These sites are not open to the public, and there are no "authorized guides" for these ruins or any other mines, kilns, or ruins in the Rosendale Cement District. There is clear signage posting the boundaries, and storm fencing. Deer holes in the fences are not a go-ahead to trespass! We don't want to have an incident that could make us close down the site.
- When the Brooklyn Bridge gates are closed, the site is closed! That was easy wasn't it? Normal hours are 10 am – 4 pm during the winter, extended to 6 pm during the late spring, summer and early fall. Note that some events now take place at night, but still, the general site is closed then.
- We had a pretty full schedule in 2021, and many of the acts will be back in 2022, with more events added. With the events comes a need for multiple volunteers, please contact us at events@centuryhouse.org.
- Speaking of events, one of the outdoor events will be the Traditional Arts Festival with local traditional crafts, demonstrations and music. If you are a traditional artist: blacksmith, potter, weaver, woodworker, basket maker ... and you can practice your craft onsite and would like to participate, contact events@centuryhouse.org for more details!
- Crowd size limits will be monitored as health regulations dictate. To accommodate this, we're strongly suggesting buying tickets beforehand so we can get an accurate count. We'll have a ticket booth for cash and electronic sales, but buying beforehand gets you and your group on the list like a real VIP. Don't forget to bring your own chairs and humid mine clothing!
- Some events now will be streamed from the Century House Music Room and eventually from the Mine.
- Getting Married? Having a Birthday? Shooting a minor or major motion picture? Consider the Estate as an event destination! Contact events@centuryhouse.org to see if we can fit you in the schedule! NO EXPLOSIVE GENDER REVEALS PLEASE – THIS IS HISTORIC SITE.

Here's a little wrap up of Events of 2021:

- We started off with a huge attendance for the Opening Day, which actually was split into a Geology Walk with Professor Steven Schimmrich and a History Walk with Bill Merchant.
- Newcomers Charming Disaster played a spooky acoustic unplugged in the mine!

- Holy River and Natasha played sets of acoustic music.
- Murder Cafe printed three shows of *Mystery In The Mine* where historical figures of the Mid Hudson Valley were swept up in a totally fictitious tale of Jealousy and Murder. They will be back with the original play form of *Dracula* in 2022.
- Taiko Masala returned for the 30th time or so, always welcome!
- Blue Museum and Dagmara presented more pop and folk rock in the mine.
- Dzieci Theatre put on two shows of *MAKBET*, their distilled version of Shakespeare's *MacBeth*, the most Polish version of the Scottish play you've ever seen.
- Mamalama and Andes Manta and the Catskill Mountain Gamelan joined forces with actors and dancers to present the expansive *Earth Opera Seeds Under Nuclear Winter* the was a highlight for many people this summer.
- The Subterranean Poetry Festival reappeared for their 30th outing. Catch excerpts in the archives of curator Chris Funkhouser's radio show *Poet Ray'd Yo* on the web at: <https://wavefarm.org/wf/archive/9y5v0g>.
- A special 9/11 concert with David Temple on guitar and Sarah Perrotta and her band for a record release party for her new album *Blue to Gold*.
- Sun and Stone returned with a roster filling two stages of light and beats. Look for more next year!
- Lara Hope and the Ark-Tones rockabilly-ed under ground with opening act Morgan O'Kane.
- And we capped off the lengthy season with *Spooky Stories* read by the local Rosendale Library with appropriate accompaniment by thereminist Carl Welden.

At these events, I always ask how many are there for the first time, and am greeted with a sea of hands, so there is definitely audience building going on. Tell your friends what a great place the Mine is to hear music, and the estate to learn about the history of the Rosendale Natural Cement Industry, its rise and fall, and what came next.

All season long, your Presidocent Henry Lowengard was at the Museum lecturing and dragging out carriages for your selfie needs every Sunday afternoon. Thanks for dropping by!

2021 also was a year of much activity onsite, most notably, the painting of the peeling barn is now complete, new stages appeared to accommodate the *Earth Opera* and other acts, a string of lights running up the hill path for night shows, and a new storage shed is being built so event supplies will be closer to the mine.

We're hoping to have an even bigger schedule in 2022, and with your help, we want to finally restore reliable electric power to the mine, which will let us put on more events with the lights on. Also returning next year will be the on-site sculpture exhibition curated by Jeff Benjamin. We plan to supplement our mostly musical events with more lectures and readings. Watch the event calendar and social media for these events, which sometimes undergo schedule changes!

As always, we'd love to have more members supporting us!

Members get a discount on events, and can visit the estate guilt free without paying the admission donation.

Please renew if you haven't already, and tell your friends! Visit the membership page at <https://centuryhouse.org/membership>.

There's also the Company Store for your CHHS merch needs. Recently added: Cement Girls and Poetry Girls items. Visit <https://centuryhouse.org/cstore>.

Henry Lowengard
CHHS Board president

Volunteer Thanks!

Thank you to our members and volunteers for a productive season. Our A-Team parking crew includes Andrea Scheer, Louisa Duffy, Anton Werner, Jake Godwin, and Ignatius A. Cavaluzzi III. We received event support from Allie Mae Schimmrich, Cheryl Rice and Lisa Kraemer.

Special thanks to John Hogan, John Gillerman, and Kieth Sanville for helping maintain the grounds throughout the season.

How can you help?

Besides renewing your membership or making a tax-deductible contribution to the Society, there are many other ways to contribute.

- Help us maintain and improve the Snyder Estate: Do you enjoy planting flowers? Scraping paint? Attacking brush? Washing windows? Email us with your interests, and someone will get back to you about current tasks around the property!
- Help out with events: Could you greet museum visitors? Park cars or take tickets at concerts? Staff our table at Rosendale Street Festival? You'd be joining a great team of volunteers!
- Donate items: Do you have extra brushes and rollers from a painting project? Unwanted garden plants? Rakes, ladders, shovels, or other tools you're downsizing? We probably have a use for them at the Snyder Estate!
- Share your advice and professional knowledge: Have you worked in an archive? Designed an exhibit? Curated an art show? Organized a capital campaign? Applied for grants? Assessed an historic building? There are many longer-term projects and goals for which the board welcomes your perspective and talents, as we assess next steps and priorities in carrying out our mission!
- Spread the word: Invite your friends and neighbors to become members. Bring someone new to the museum or a show. Share our events on Facebook and beyond. Wear and carry your CHHS swag (available in our museum store!) near and far!
- Help us collect and share Rosendale cement stories! Do you have a local memory to share? An interesting image or artifact to pass along? A cement industry question to which you're seeking an answer (we'll do our best)? We'd love to include your contributions in our newsletter or incorporate them into future interpretive displays.

Continued from page 1

Previous archaeological research in the area has focused on the tools and techniques of cement manufacture and coopering as well as a basic survey and overview of surround sites (Howe 2007, Moyer 2008). I have been interested in how the workers and their families, during the peak years of production, coped with the environmental extremes and stresses produced by cement manufacture. For this reason, the center of my research is the remains of a cluster of miners' 'doublehouses' within a quarter mile of the kilns and mills of the original factory in Whiteport, and within a mile of several mines. At present, the remains of these houses consist of stone foundations, and the surrounding landscape is undisturbed by any significant subsequent human transformation.

Excavations and sampling in this area during the summer of 2018 has revealed a significant preponderance of shards of bottles of extracts, bitters, alcohol and especially patent medicines such as "Mother Winslow's Soothing Syrup (1887)" "Mother Noble's Healing Syrup (1879)," and "Piso's Cure for Consumption (1869)." Several of these patent medicines contained very powerful opium-based sedatives such as heroin and morphine – as well as cannabis and alcohol – in large doses, often causing the people who ingested them (frequently children) to fall into a slumber from which they would never return. In association with local newspaper accounts relating many suicides by "laudanum" (an opiate based sedative) as well as advertisements for purported cures for opium addiction, the project of anaesthetization that accompanied industrial society begins to emerge as a presence that cannot be ignored.

Archaeology's capacity to dissolve time is manifest in these shards of sensory renunciation; as I begin my days living and working within my region of study, I come across near daily newspaper accounts of deaths, arrests and accidents attributed to opioids. The significance of this present research is underscored by the pervasiveness of the problem. Ulster County, where Whiteport is located, is ranked second in New York State for opioid overdoses (Doxsey 2019).

However, the working conditions, illnesses and symptoms that contributed to this mass anaesthetization in the mid to late 1800's were very different from what we see today. Perhaps of greatest significance are past atmospheric conditions. As a cultural artifact, the mutability of the composition of the earth's atmosphere is of vital concern: the intensity and duration of atmospheric change, what was being smelled, inhaled, felt on the skin, tasted in the air, ingested and absorbed. During this time, opium was primarily used not for pain management but rather as a form of relief for the coughing brought on by air-borne irritants and lung illnesses (Hodgson 2001). Our present day "cough syrup" is an artifact of this. For this reason, in conjunction with my excavation work, I have taken several soil core samples within the region, and have begun analyzing them for their elemental composition, to try to understand what people who lived there were breathing on a daily basis.

As I am understanding it, it seems that archaeology's contribution to scientific and humanistic discourse is just as much qualitative as it is quantitative: it seeks to take part in the overall tone of discourse, the concerns and problems of society as our challenges unfold. Within this particular issue of industrialization and the problems that it has posed, archaeology is perhaps the best suited discipline to discuss the issues of the Anthropocene (Edgeworth 2014, Petursdottir 2017) for it is within the earth, water and air that these problems are imbedded. I offer this research as one small part of this work.



Above: Mother Noble's Soothing Syrup. Bottle Fragment found at Whiteport, New York. August 2018. Many thanks to Joseph Diamond for his assistance with shard identification.



Right: Excavation work at Whiteport School. Whiteport, New York. August, 2018. Thanks to Amanda Heidel.

References

- Center for Disease Control. 2018. "Overview of the Drug Overdose Epidemic: Behind the Numbers," <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/index.html>. Accessed February 10, 2018.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. 1992. "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered," in *October*, 62, 3-41.
- Doxsey, Patricia. September 21, 2019. "Opioid deaths grow in Mid-Hudson, Catkills," in *The Daily Freeman*. Kingston, NY.
- Edgeworth, M., 2014: Introduction, *Journal of contemporary archaeology* 1(1), 73–77.
- Gilchrist, Ann. 1976. *Footsteps Across Cement: A History of the Township of Rosendale, New York*.
- Hodgson, Barbara. 2001. *In the Arms of Morpheus: The Tragic History of Laudanum, Morphine, and Patent Medicines*. Buffalo: Firefly Books.
- Howe, Dennis. 2007. "An Archaeological Survey of the Whiteport Cement Works," in *I.A.: The Journal of the Society for Industrial Archeology*. 33(1): 5-26.
- Moyer, David. 2008. "An Archaeological Survey of Three Historic Industrial Cement Companies in Rosendale, New York." Upper Susquehanna Chapter, NYAA Chenango, NYSAA.
- Mumford, Lewis. 1963 [1934]. *Technics and Civilization*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World.
- Pétursdóttir, Thora. 2017. "Climate Change? Archaeology and the Anthropocene," in *Archaeological Dialogues*, 24(2): 175-205.
- Phelps 1883 [1871]. *The Silent Partner*. New York: Feminist Press.

A Few Recent Pictures!



Pictures from the Halloween Haunted Century House. Bill Kraemer as Spider-Man and John Hogan as a Monk.

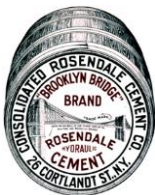


Visit the Widow Jane Mine



Next season will be better than ever!

Keep an eye on our website for spring and summer events!



2021 ANNUAL BALLOT

Century House Historical Society



The following members are running for election or reelection to a two-year term on the Century House Historical Society Board of Trustees. Indicate your vote for up to seven members with a check mark or provide the names of up to seven other Society members as write-in candidates.

_____ David Kime	or write-in candidate: _____
_____ Bill Kraemer	or write-in candidate: _____
_____ Henry Lowengard	or write-in candidate: _____
_____ Michael McCabe	or write-in candidate: _____
_____ Bill Merchant	or write-in candidate: _____
_____ Laurel Mutti	or write-in candidate: _____
_____ Steven Schimmrich	or write-in candidate: _____

If you cannot attend the Annual Meeting, please sign to request that the Secretary casts your ballot for you at the meeting and return to the Society prior to December 4, 2021.

Print: _____ Sign: _____

2022 ANNUAL DUES

Your 2022 Society dues entitle you to all membership benefits for the new calendar year

Century House Historical Society Membership Dues:

Individual Membership	\$25	Membership Fee: \$ _____
Family Membership	\$50	Tax-Deductible Contribution: \$ _____
Corporate Annual	\$250	Total: \$ _____
Lifetime Individual	\$500	

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

Please return your ballot and dues to:

Century House Historical Society
PO Box 150
Rosendale, NY 12472

[ADDRESS LABEL]

BALLOT AND DUES STATEMENT ON REVERSE!

Century House Historical Society

Economic Geology of the Rosendale Natural Cement Region

Dr. Kurtis C. Burmeister

Sacramento State University

Saturday, 12/4/2021, 1:00 PM

Snyder Estate (Tickets Required, Seating Limited)

Join Online/ZOOM Link: centuryhouse.org/AM-2021

Kurtis Burmeister, Ph.D. – Kurt is an Assistant Professor of Field Geology in the Geology Department at Sacramento State University. His research explores topics broadly associated with convergent tectonics and has active projects in western Ireland, Sierra Nevada, upstate New York, and southern Japan. Kurt holds a BA in Biological Sciences and an MA in Vertebrate Paleontology from UC Santa Barbara, and a PhD in Structural Geology from the University of Illinois. Kurt is also the Executive Secretary of the USGS/NAGT Cooperative Field Training Program, Director of the Wasatch-Uinta Geological Field Camp Program, and an Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Illinois.



The Rosendale region of eastern New York State is widely recognized as the source of one of the highest quality natural cements ever produced. Founded in 1819 by Canvass White in central New York, the American natural cement industry soon shifted to Rosendale where it flourished for over 150 years. By the end of the 19th century, the superior quality of Rosendale cement was known worldwide and actively used in the construction of some of America's most enduring landmarks. Rosendale natural cement's reputation stems from the unique composition of the dolostone in the Silurian Rondout Formation from which it is manufactured. Miners utilized room-and-pillar techniques to extract this dolostone from strongly deformed strata in the Rosendale region, creating unique bedrock exposures that are truly engineering marvels. These mine exposures have long attracted the attention of geologists for research and education. Production of natural cement transformed extracted dolostone into cement through a labor-intensive process involving calcination in kilns, cracking, grinding, and packaging. Barrels of cement were quickly shipped at competitive prices via the Delaware & Hudson Canal, which directly connected the Rosendale region to major shipping avenues.



CHHS Annual Meeting & Lecture

**Saturday, December 4
1:00 pm**

Join us on Zoom

*Limited seating at the Snyder Estate
Tickets required*

**For more information, and
the Zoom link, visit:**

www.centuryhouse.org/am-2021