



Deerpark Diary

Town of Deerpark 1863 School House Museum

Town of Deerpark Historian, P. O. Box 621, Huguenot, New York 12746

Contact: 845-856-2702 e-mail historian@townofdeerparkny.gov

website: www.1863schoolhouse.org

March, 2021

Vol. 18

No. 1

- **Introduction**
The Neversink River
- **Paradise Island**
- **Cuddebackville Dams**
- **River Crossings**

The Neversink River

The December, 2020 issue contains a short description of the Neversink River and some historic stories connected with the river which flows through the Town of Deerpark. Because it has been a major influence in the development of the town from the time of the Lenape Indians who settled here before the early settlers arrived in the 1690s and today, there are many historical stories to write about.

This issue begins with Paradise Island.



Neversink River near Guymard Turnpike

Paradise Island

Paradise Island is located in the Neversink River near the Orange/Sullivan County line. At one time the island was known as "Mei's Island." It is owned by Audrey and Marco Bianco, who graciously invited me to visit their Paradise. The 20-acre island is about one mile long and is accessible by walking over a suspension bridge.

Marco's grandfather, Armando Mei, bought the island in 1961 from the Benedict family. When Marco was a child he and his sisters Christina and Julia and his brother, A. J. spent their summer vacations visiting the island with their family. One of their favorite pastimes was riding their bicycles over the suspension bridge and touring up and down the entire island. This was a family tradition that everyone enjoyed. Unfortunately, there was much destruction on the island from the 2005 flood which devastated much of the land along the Neversink River.

Today much has been restored. The upstream area is beautifully landscaped with a pool, an entertainment center and many seating areas to enjoy views of the river and surrounding woodland scenery. There are two buildings in the central part of the island.

One is a small house used for entertaining guests. The other is a beautifully furnished 1920's stone house.



Picnic Area

After touring the upstream section of the island we walked in the downstream direction along a well-marked path to enjoy a heavily-forested area of 50'-60' foot tall pines. Paths make for easy walking while enjoying this primeval forest.

Audrey shared the following publication from 1935, written by a Knight Templar after a group of Masons had visited the island, owned by Bill Benedict. Chalmer Pancoast's, (Knight Templar) words express how the natural beauty of this remarkable place affected him.

Excerpts

Templar Tales

"Your Pot of Gold"

by **Chalmers Lowell Pancoast**
Gettinger Press NY, NY 1935

"Bill Benedict was at one time in ill health, but he redis-

covered good health in this pine-scented island of natural treasures. On his sick bed came the news that he could gain the possession of the majestic trees on the island, which had been sold to be cut down before he bought the island. He had once thought these trees were lost to him.

“But a severe winter, deep snows, and a river of treacherous ice all conspired against an expiring contract to save these splendid trees from a greedy woodman’s axe. The story of how these fine specimens of century-grown trees were saved from being chopped down and sawed into crude, unmarketable lumber reads like a thrilling adventure. Here the elements of nature in all their viciousness came to the rescue of the forest.

“As a guest of ...it was my privilege to enjoy a day at Paradise Island. I was particularly impressed with the friendly way in which Bill Benedict shared the glories and charm of his secluded island. It can be reached only via a swinging foot bridge. To Bill Benedict it evidently wasn’t anything unusual to invite his friends to enjoy Paradise Island with him. No doubt it did not occur to him that he was sharing his riches, giving of his wealth, his treasures, that others might find wealth-happiness in their enjoyment and appreciation.

“Paradise Island is a virgin forest of tall and proud looking pines. Their height astonishes one and arouses admiration. Then in this grove there are buttonwood, sycamores, iron and flowering tulip trees all towering straight and majestically toward the open sky. Long cable-like grape vines swing

freely from the higher branches, reaching for the tree tops where their delicious fruit is ripened in the sunlight and by the touch of Jack Frost’s fingers.



Bald Eagle in tall white pine

“Here is a primeval forest centuries in the making with a thick carpet of pine needles, forming the warp for a natural pattern of ferns and rhododendron and wild flowers. Into this natural amphitheatre of beauty come birds of all kinds, and deer and wild animals for protection. For the owner of Paradise Island never kills the birds and wild life that seek this haven of rest and security.

“It is rather difficult to describe this wild garden spot where all nature seems so in harmony, and where the human mind finds such utter contentment, and the soul peace in the contemplation of the Divine handiwork in nature.”

Even today visitors to Paradise Island come away with these same impressions. The island is aptly named, Paradise Island.

§

Cuddebackville Dams

Two dams were built across the Neversink River in Cuddebackville.

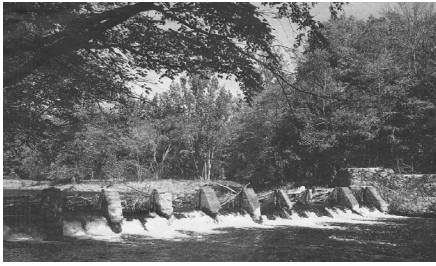
The first dam was built in

the 1820s when the D & H Canal was under construction. The purpose of this dam was to divert water into the feeder system which supplied water to the canal at Lock #51. The canal company had invested over \$250,000.00 in the construction of the dam, feeder canal, feeder gates, waste weirs and other hydraulic equipment to insure the flow of water which was vital to the canal’s operations. This feeder provided much needed water to flow into the canal for the Summit level (about 15 miles). With no locks until Summitville, this section was popular in the summertime for excursions and outings on canal boats that were converted to provide special seating for passengers



Passenger Excursion Canal Boat

The second dam was built in 1903 to divert water to turbines to generate electricity for the Neversink Light and Power Company, headed by Dr. Henry MacBrair. He had purchased the rights to the water in the Neversink River the feeder canal, and a one-mile section of the D & H Canal. Heavy duty oaken flood gates, operated by cogs, controlled the amount of water that entered the feeder. An overflow weir drained excess water along the west side of the canal back into the Neversink River. Raising the walls of the former boat basin eight feet created a power pool allowing the incoming water to fall thirty-two feet to turn turbine wheels to generate electricity.



Cuddebackville Dam

The dam was removed in October, 2004 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in partnership with the Nature Conservancy to supposedly benefit dwarf wedge mussels. Removal of the dam eliminated the flow of water into the D & H Canal feeder, thereby destroying the one -mile long segment of the D & H Canal within the Orange County D & H Canal Park, Cuddebackville. This is one of the five sections of the canal, registered as a National Landmark (1968). The feeder and canal were the only original sections of the canal that held navigable water. Roebling aqueducts abutments are also still standing at the Neversink River crossing.

§

River Crossings

Fording a river was the only way anyone who wanted to get from one shore to another. This meant scouting the river for a shallow place with good footing. During dry spells this was not a big problem.

Two such places were lo-



cated in the Town of Deerpark. One fording place was along the Old Mine Road (Route 209) at Cuddebackville and the other in Huguenot (behind the former Cornucopia Restaurant). Eventually bridges were built to make travel easier and accommodate travel year round.

The Fort DeWitt Bridge Company

The Bridge That Never Was-- March 22, 1839

The state legislature passed the following Bridge Permit on March 22, 1839:

William Cuddeback, Lewis Cuddeback, and Lawrence I. Van Kleeck, and such other persons who shall join them shall be incorporated as "The Fort DeWitt Bridge Company", for the purpose of building a toll bridge over the Neversink River, at or near the fording place on the road leading from Cuddebackville to Port Jervis. The capital stock was to be \$4,000.00 with shares at \$25.00 each. The men named above were appointed commissioners to sell the stock in the company at such time and place in the Town of Deerpark, as they shall decide.

Specifications for building the bridge were specifically stated: 18 feet wide; span of at least 160 feet from one pier to the other; covered with a good roof; a toll gate at either end of the bridge to collect tolls; (The tolls to be charged were specified—foot traffic, carriages, horses, farm animals etc.); a fine of \$1.00 for riding or driving faster than a walk; and no bridge or ferry may be built within a mile either way. Many exemptions were listed for

circumstances under which local residents did not have to pay tolls. Also The D & H Canal aqueduct was just north of the site for this bridge giving a crossing of the river without paying any tolls.

Specified in this legislative permit was the fact that if the bridge was not built within three years the company would be dissolved. No record of a covered bridge over the Neversink River in Cuddebackville exists.

Three Bridge Crossings in the Town of Deerpark Cuddebackville

A wooden suspension bridge was built around 1850. It served wagons and horses well for fifty years. The increase in traffic as well as the introduction of the automobile warranted a more sturdy bridge.



1850 1902

An iron bridge was commissioned in 1902. This iron bridge survived the 1904 ice jam and numerous floods.



1902-1928

A steel bridge was built in 1928 and lasted until it was replaced by the current bridge.



1928-2013

Godeffroy

The first bridge to cross the Neversink in Godeffroy was built by Peter Gumaer in 1850 which gave access to the resort at Guymard Lake. It was a wooden suspension bridge with a sign which reads "\$5.00 Fine for anyone crossing this bridge faster than a walk." This original sign has been preserved and is located at the Town of Deerpark Museum.



1850-1897

In 1897, this bridge was in need of repair and a new wooden bridge was built. An overloaded truck caused the collapse of this bridge.



1897-1927

In 1928, the old 1902 Cuddebackville iron bridge was dismantled and moved to the Neversink River crossing on Guymard

Turnpike to replace the 1897 bridge. (Iron bridge picture is on previous page)



1973-Present

The iron bridge was replaced by Orange County in 1975 with the present-day bridge.

Huguenot

Unfortunately there are no records or pictures of bridge crossings over the Neversink River on Neversink Drive. If anyone has any history or pictures about this crossing, the Deerpark Historian's office would greatly appreciate any information. Please contact Norma Schadt, Town Historian, at PO Box 621, Huguenot, or phone 845-856-2702 or e-mail historian@townofdeerparkny.gov. Thank you.

Bridges for Boats

When the D & H Canal was built it was necessary for the boats to navigate aqueducts over rivers and other waterways. The original aqueduct (1828)) crossing the Neversink River needed to be replaced to carry larger boat



Roebling Aqueduct over the Neversink River

John Augustus Roebling celebrated two milestones in June

of 1849, his 43rd birthday and the beginning of construction of the Neversink Aqueduct. It was the third of the four aqueducts he would design and build for the D & H Canal Company,

He estimated then that a one-span aqueduct across the Neversink would cost \$25,000.00 while a two-span structure could be built for \$18,000, plus \$500 for building an anchorage on the west face. The D & H Canal company chose the one-span aqueduct because it eliminated the problem of an ice jam and allowed the river to flow more freely during flooding season.

A Bridge for Railroads

Bridge for the PJM&NY Railroad



Railroad Bridge - 1904 Ice Storm

In October 1888, the railroad began building a second line from Huguenot through Peenpack over the Neversink River, through Westbrookville. This allowed the railroad to connect with the NYO&W in Summitville. The NYO&W carried coal east to the Hudson and also passengers to the New York City area. This expansion increased business for the PJM&NY Railroad, both passenger service to our area and coal transportation from Pennsylvania.

*Editor's Note—For greater details about bridges see the Dec. 2008 issue