

THE "LOST" HAMLET OF WOODBURY FALLS

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Early in the 1800's, a young man by the name of Peter Parrott was hired by then New York State Governor Kemble and the Senior Parrott, to manage an iron furnace in a small enclave called Woodbury Falls. Conditions for a successful operation of the furnace were evident..... abundance of trees to cut and make charcoal, an ample supply of water power from the nearby falls and a highway nearby. Peter found housing in the nearby Pembleton boarding house. His neighbor was the Hall Line Fishing Company, owned by Alexander G. Hall. This factory was close to the "falls, a rock formation on the Woodbury Creek". Small farms dotted the area surrounding the roadway. The Widow VanAmbrose's house was a short distance north at the corner of Trout Brook and Rt. 32. (Accounts of Revolutionary War activity mention this house and its role when George Washington traveled through the Clove.)

Slightly north was sweet Clover Farm, owned by Quaker Thomas Seaman. Although a Quaker Meeting house had been built in the area in 1801, the Seamans occasionally opened their home to Quaker meetings and also operated a school for some time. Their unusually wide, well ventilated hallway served as a perfect location for their gatherings. Further north on the flats, a hospital had been established in the Revolutionary War. The diaries of the Seaman women indicated that they had woven sheets/coverings for the hospital. (Some blankets still existed in the late 1900's.)

In the early 1800's, there were also a number of small farms on Smith Clove Road, Woodbury Falls (called Stony Vale). Some farmers operated charcoal pits, supplying both the WF and Arden furnaces. The Seaman diaries note that there was a constant haze in the Clove....smoke from the pits. If laundry was hung out to dry, it was covered with black soot.

The residents needed a school for their children. In the 1880's, School District #1 was established under the name of "Woodbury Falls". The first small building was located at the corner of Trout Brook and Route 32, across from Widow VanAmbrose. A larger one room building was later constructed just east on Trout Brook Rd. That building stands today and is a private residence. The interior walls remained in tact (at the author's last visit in 1980.)

The coming of the railroad, with its scheduled stops at Woodbury Falls, Houghton Farms and points north brought a different kind of activity to the hamlet....Tourists. A post office was established in the 1800's and a small general store met the needs of many residents. VanCleft, Pembleton, Wolf's (next to Highland Stone), and many small farmers began to take boarders. Rushmore's selected Woodbury Falls as they settled into Orange County.

Earlier, Peter Parrott found WF a dull and boring existence and was able to relocate and manage the Greenwood Furnace. The abuse which had befallen the area left few trees untouched by the charcoal makers. Hall Line Company moved to Railroad Avenue, Highland Mills. E.H.Harriman family began to acquire the small farms along Smith Clove Road thus making the small farm owners, tenants. The population dwindled and, in the 1930's the school closed and the children were bussed to Highland Mills School. Changes in the railroad, Route 32 also altered the character of the area. In the 1940's, a large parcel of property was purchased by the United States Military Academy, West Point.

Time has passed and Woodbury Falls will never be able to become a political entity. Driving on the two north/south roadways, one has few reminders of this once thriving little community. Those who have remained here have come to enjoy the solitude and beauty of the mountains, the streams and the wild life which has found its place of safety in the forest. We have silently watched as four attempts to develop the private lands have failed.

Finally, one day in 2013-2014, we awoke to the sound of the bulldozer taking down one of the old 1820's farmhouses we had become so accustomed to seeing. The Wallen, Leone, Shenya property, now known as Legacy Ridge had been purchased by the Open Space Conservancy. Over 700 acres of prime and beautiful land in the Clove!

Woodbury Falls will once again serve its community in quite a different way. Its place in history will be that it has saved a valuable piece of the Hudson Highlands for all to enjoy and treasure. Significant hiking paths will be routed through the area. It will serve as safe haven for the many animal species who once traveled throughout the valley and perhaps there will again be a forest of the many lost species of trees once native to the area. It may be a "Lost Hamlet" but it will be long remembered for its contribution to all.