

WALDEN'S 8TH ANNUAL LOCAL HISTORY DAY—MARCH 29, 2009

Lisa Melville, Trustee, Historical Society of Walden and the Walkill Valley

Good afternoon, my name is Lisa Melville and I am one of the trustees in the Walden Historical Society. I'd like to welcome everyone to Walden's 8th Annual Local History Day. ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS-Barbara will say at the end.

This event was started as a fun way to learn about local history. This year we are going to take a look at one of our cemeteries, the Walkill Valley Cemetery located on Rt. 52 right outside of the village.

History comes alive when we realize that the people buried there actually lived and helped make this community what it is today. A cemetery is a tangible link to the past, and a place that is sacred. When people understand the importance of cemeteries, they are more likely to respect them and recognize the importance of conservation of cemeteries in their community.

The village originally had several cemeteries inside the village boundaries associated with the churches in the village. For instance, the Dutch Reformed church had a cemetery located on the hillside between Church Street and Orange Avenue (Rt 52) on two sides and Scofield Street on the other, where an attorney office building is today. It seemed that after heavy storms it was a common occurrence to find that dirt washed away exposing parts of caskets. When the Walkill Valley Cemetery came into being those stones and the deceased were moved to the new cemetery. There was also property located on

Center Street that was owned by the Methodist church, according to Charles Bodine, a village historian, burials did take place here and that this cemetery was also moved at some point.

Beginning with early settlements, it was commonplace to have grave yards embedded in the village or town, in or around common areas or beside a house of worship. The stones were moved to the new cemetery, but in many cases the bodies still lie in their original grave. We are not sure if there were other cemeteries within the village boundaries and need to do more research on the topic to be certain. It is assumed that those cemeteries that we know about had both stones and bodies relocated, but that has not always been the case in these situations, but we believe it is the case in Walden.

The Wallkill Valley Cemetery is where many of the stones from older cemeteries in the village and surrounding areas were relocated.

We do know that there were other cemeteries outside of the village associated with churches, such as St. Andrew's church and the Reformed Dutch church at Berea that were running out of space as the village and town populations grew and that a large cemetery like Wallkill Valley was necessary. The original St. Andrews church is rumored to have been a log church built somewhere on Henry Wildman's estate, his property was considerable, originally being a 3000 acre patent. The mill he operated along with his dwelling was located on Rt. 208 outside of the village.

A study of early maps reveals that Wilemantown was not just a single farm but a settlement consisting of a number of houses whose remains are an undiscovered archaeological resource of considerable potential for understanding the earliest English settlement of this part of New York.

Upon Wileman's death, his wife inherited his estate, but used it to pay off substantial debts. The land was sold or transferred to her attorney Peter DuBois in 1745. After living there for a number of years in a stone house, presumably Wileman's, he built a substantial brick mansion adjacent to the original site and razed the old house, using the stone in the new foundations. During the Revolutionary War DuBois, a Tory, fled to New York City. His abandoned house was used as an arsenal by Continental troops during the winter of 1783. The soldiers tore the lead flashing from the roof and pediments to make bullets, causing extensive leakage which eventually ruined the abandoned structure. It was demolished in 1810.

Mrs. May Hunt Atkin in her history of St. Andrew's states that Mr. Wileman was the first settled and upon his land that Log Church was erected sometime in the early 1700s and a plot of land adjoining his land set aside for a burial place. Sometime in the 1770s a church was built at the site along St. Andrew's road on land donated by Mr. DuBois, there was also 220 acres, presented by Richard Bradley, Attorney General of the colony. This tract was situated about a mile from the church, and was afterwards known as the King's Hill Farm. This church was demolished when a new church was built in the Village of Walden the cemetery was not relocated and still exists along St. Andrews Road.

This stone found in Wallkill Valley Cemetery seems to indicate that there was a cemetery near the original church on Wilemans property and that the stones were moved from that site. Eager's History of Orange County, in 1846 states: "One of these stones has this inscription on it, "Here lies the body of Mary, wife of John Green, who died June 17, 1752, aged 57." When this property was farmed by Mr. George Dunn, he gave this stone to the trustees of the Wallkill Valley Cemetery Association upon their request for the purpose of perpetuating the memory of this old log church and graveyard. Said trustees placed the stone on the north side of the entrance to the receiving vault, and had an additional inscription cut embodying the above facts.

It is believed that this graveyard was originally somewhere in the vicinity of the golf course by Lake Osiris.

There is a rather funny legend about Henry Wilemans burial. It seems that it was the custom back then to celebrate at a person's funeral with lots of food and drink. The folks celebrating at Wilemans funeral drank a little too much and when it was time to escort him to the burial ground they were too drunk to make it there. A couple of them came back with shovels and buried him right there by the road. Well when the time came to give Henry a proper burial they couldn't locate the spot where he had been buried, he remained in that spot until his coffin was discovered many years later during the excavation of a house foundation- probably for the house near the antiques barn on Rt. 208 close to Wildman's house. It is believed that Wileman was moved at that time to the graveyard near Lake Osiris and given a proper burial.

Berea Cemetery was established in the early 1820s in the town of Montgomery. It was owned and maintained by the Reformed Dutch Church of Berea up until July 13, 1901 when the church closed. At some point the cemetery became the property of the Wallkill Presbyterian Church and later an association was formed for its maintenance. In May of 1922 the church building was removed to East Walden.

Besides the cemeteries associated with the area churches there are small family cemeteries around the area, such as the Colden Family Cemetery, these small burial grounds are early and once there were incorporated cemeteries they were not used anymore.

We want to point out that Walden and its surroundings were originally settled by Munsee Indians (also called Lenape and later called Delaware Indians) this was the predominate tribe in Orange County and there are burial grounds in the region. These tribes had sophisticated burial rites and grounds that are located in the area. Some are known and some are not, the ones that are known are kept somewhat confidential to avoid disturbance and those seeking to loot artifacts.

African Americans were also residents and there are rumored slave and free- black cemeteries in the area. One that we do know about is in Walden on Liberty Street, it is mentioned several times in Bodine's writings and is a well known oral history.

Historically it is difficult to identify African American cemeteries because they are situated in remote locations often on what was once undesired land, wet swampy areas or least developed land in a community far away from their white contemporaries. We

recently found out that Berea Cemetery had set aside a black section that was within the White Cemetery and that a black man named Pompey Graham, who was 119 at the time of his death in 1884 was buried there. This would have placed his birth in 1765. Whether he had lived part of life as a slave we do not know, but he was a witness to the Revolution and to the end of slavery in NY in 1827 at the age of 62.

Slavery ended officially in NY in 1827 although it began to end with a plan developed in 1799. The plan was for a gradual emancipation, so that current slave owners would not lose their slaves and their economic investment. New York was the largest slave state in the north and slavery was not ended without conflict. Even when slavery was ended there was still racism and separation of white people from African Americans, this division is forever recorded in cemeteries that were isolated outside of the white community. It is important to preserve our African American Cemeteries; they are an integral part of our community's history. A very important way of doing this is to make sure that the oral history of their location is not forgotten, once it is forgotten it is easier to overlook them and they may succumb to development pressures. Oral histories can always be investigated, perhaps a topic for a future local history day program or a good project for the history club.

The Wallkill Valley Cemetery was incorporated on September 15, 1865. It started as 13 acres of plots, drives and walks. Twenty-six additional acres were plotted under the eminent landscape architect, Downing Vaux, the son of Calvert Vaux who named him after his business partner A.J. Downing. Additional acres were added at various times

resulting in the current total of 67.7 acres. In the early 1900s it was advertised as “The Most Beautiful Garden Spot of the Dead in all this Wondrous Valley.”

Downing Park in Newburgh is another local example of the Park movement. Downing Park is a 35-acre landscape park located in the heart of the City of Newburgh. Filled with hills and valleys, streams, a pond, and a rich variety of vegetation, the park has serpentine paths and picturesque vista — features very similar, though on a different scale, to those of New York City's Central Park, created by the same designers. As it happened, Downing Park was the last collaborative effort by Olmsted and Vaux — as well as the only project that included both their sons, John Olmsted and Downing Vaux. The park was named after Newburgh's native son Andrew Jackson Downing. Downing Park was designed to be a passive, contemplative environment, a place of refuge in the center of bustling city.

A cemetery was a public institution, anyone who liked could buy a plot; there were even designated areas for single graves, for those who could not afford an entire plot. The people were encouraged to come stroll, soak in the scenery and benefit from the lessons and cultural enrichment the site offered. While this movement started in urban centers it had reached Walden by 1865, as evidenced by the hiring of Downing Vaux as the Landscape architect.

As Walden continued to grow, it was decided that one large cemetery would better serve the area and that it could be maintained more efficiently. This was also the time when Cemeteries were being planned as Landscape Parks and were the predecessor of

Parks such as Central Park. This movement grew out of an industrializing country where people in urban areas longed for a connection with nature. The popularity of these places was the driving force behind the development of the great public urban parks. Clearly, there was a need for a respite from the new industrial urban life. Walden at this time was quite industrial and a place to stroll would have been a nice respite.

The first person buried in the Wallkill Valley Cemetery was Elizabeth Millspaugh in 1867. The Wallkill Valley Cemetery is also the final resting place of many prominent Walden and Montgomery citizens. Graveyards or cemeteries can provide many insights into social history as well as providing places of contemplation and peacefulness. While it is said that death is the great leveller, difference in rank and class are often carried though to the grave. It is interesting though that while the search for the famous may lead us to the grave yard, that search will often uncover the lives of countless others whose memories may until then have been neglected.

We are lucky to have with us today, the Walden Elementary School History Club. There students who will be taking on the persona of some our ancestors, we will be learning about them and also see where their final resting place is and would encourage everyone to continue to explore the history of the cemetery.

NAMES OF STUDENTS AND WHO THEY ARE PORTRAYING

James Todd - Cassidy Skakel

John Hays – Sammy Moumen

George Ronk – Brandon DiSimone

Egon Pelzeder — Kassie Mochi

Seth Capron – Sara Donovan

Levi Gowdy - Jonathan Noel

Thomas Bradley – Sara Donovan

Louise Bradley - Kassidy Skakel

Josephine Bradley – Sammy Moumen

ENDING

The purpose of studying a cemetery is to encourage an appreciation of its unique historical significance. Take a walk in the cemetery and visit the past. We hope that today's program has made us all remember those who came before and appreciate their contribution to our community. Thank you.....