



Down in the Valley

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TOMPKINS CORNERS CHURCH TO HAVE NEW LIFE



When we last wrote about the church at Tompkins Corners in late 2013, it looked as though the last of Putnam Valley's four old Methodist churches was about to go. Closed in 2011, the property was put up for sale by the area Methodist Conference. Even though the 1891 Carpenter Gothic church was our town's only structure listed on the National Register, it had no protection from demolition by a new owner or from alterations that would change its exterior and destroy the character of Tompkins Corners. The situation was dire: no church could afford to buy it, and there was no existing organization that could use it. People who cared about Tompkins Corners were fearful that this landmark on a county-designated Historic Road would certainly be sold and probably razed or ruined by alterations.

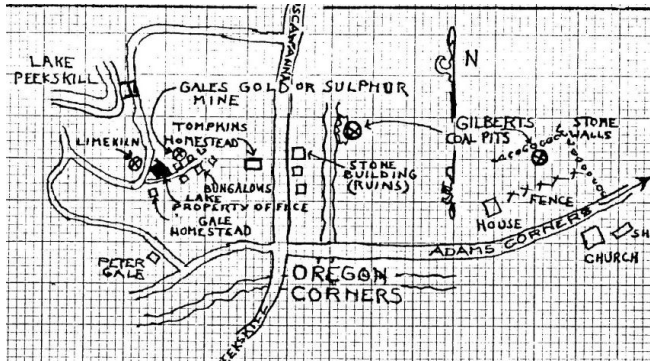
Happily, it appears that an imaginative and determined group of town residents have stepped in with a plan to save the building by creating and maintaining an arts and cultural center there. The Tompkins Corners Cultural Center will preserve the exterior of the church while utilizing the building as a community space for cultural events. Old editions of *The Putnam County Courier* show that the church was traditionally a community center with its "frolics," "sociable," and election day gatherings in the 19th century. And many in town remember its hamburger & corn roasts, strawberry festivals, and flea markets regularly held not so long ago. The Tompkins Corners Cultural Center hopes to bring back its former function as a place for people to get together to celebrate, especially with music, plays and readings, dance and theater, attracting local and visiting artists and performers.

The Tompkins Corners Cultural Center has more than laid the groundwork for achieving this. They have become a 501(c)(3) organization and have signed a contract

Nevertheless, the federal government’s Mineral Resource Data System (MRDS) doesn’t include Taylor’s mine. But anyone who walks along Sunk Mine Road today and who looks across the pond from the east end of the Pratt mine can see it – if one knows what to look for.

Albee was less impressed by the tale told to him in 1936 by Theodore “Dod”

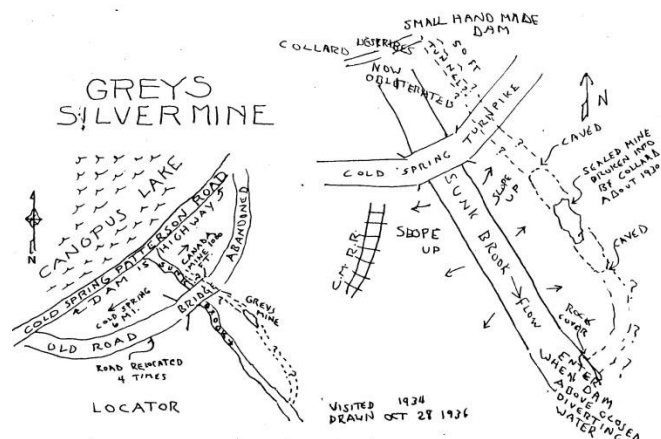
Tompkins, then 75. It concerned the so-called Gilbert Coal mine at Oregon Corners. Tompkins reported that Cortlandt Gilbert had found a combustible rock that was thought to be similar to coal. Similar enough at any rate for Gilbert to sell \$5 shares in a mining company to local farmers. And enough that Gilbert did some digging at two different places at Oregon Corners.



Albee made one of his sketches of the “mines” but expressed his skepticism of there actually being coal there.

The map also showed Peter Gale’s “gold or sulphur mine”. Peter Gale, who lived on Hollowbrook Road just west of Oregon Corners, probably made more money from his celebrated ice cream than from any “gold” he may have claimed to have found. Long before Gale’s time when William J. Blake published his county history in 1849, Blake had already inspected some so-called coal from Putnam County and concluded that it had “been buried by a designing person with a view to get up an excitement, or organize a company to dig there for coal.”

Peter Gale was not the only “discoverer” of precious metals in Putnam Valley. There were others in both Putnam Valley and Philipstown: Donohue’s silver mine, Manitou silver mine, Braasch silver and gold mine, the Wayside gold mine, Benson’s silver mine and Smith’s gold mine. Usually they were just myths, usually involving someone taken to see a mine blindfolded so that he could not later describe where it was. Most were probably “salted” to increase the value of land that someone wanted to sell. The best known of the “silver” mines was owned by an old man named Grey. Its location was supposedly a well-kept secret. Yet in 1936, Albee was able to draw a clear map that will take you there without difficulty.



I print it here for you, dear reader, so that you may become immensely rich. Good luck!

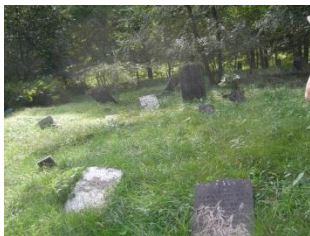
**THANKS TO EVERYBODY WHO CONTRIBUTED
TO THE HOLIDAY BOUTIQUE !**

HALLOWEEN TALK BY DAN RICCI

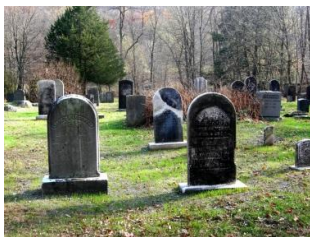
Dan Ricci, our Town Historian, gave a Halloween talk about Putnam County ghosts. Dan discussed the difference between what *seems* like the unexplained versus what is *actually* inexplicable. There was a long session for audience members to share their own Putnam Valley ghost encounters, for which Dan provided relevant histories – even identifying some ghosts - to explain what they may have experienced. Our reporter says: it was *very cool*. And scary?

ADAMS CORNERS CEMETERY RESTORED

The Adams Corners Cemetery on Peekskill Hollow Road has been restored, thanks to the work of Grace United Methodist Church, the owner of the cemetery, and a legacy from Harry G. Silleck, Jr. The cemetery had been neglected in recent years, and many of its gravestones were overturned, buried, broken, cracked, and covered with lichen and mold. When Eric “Ron” Petersen studied and surveyed the cemetery between 1995 and 2010, he found that of the 207 graves listed in Barbara Buys’ *Old Gravestones of Putnam County, New York*, that 53 stones were down or broken. He didn’t even count others that were buried, tilted, or filthy.



Harry Silleck was committed to cemetery restoration. As chairman of the Putnam County Cemetery Committee (and former president of the Putnam Valley Historical Society), he promoted the care and rehabilitation of county cemeteries, especially those in Putnam Valley. As an attorney, he had dealt with the legal responsibility to care for the Peekskill Hollow Cemetery (a/k/a Tompkins Corners) after Sadie Sheldon died; unfortunately, cemetery records of purchases of grave plot had



been stored in her memory and nowhere else. He persuaded the town to take responsibility for the maintenance of the burial ground and was pleased when the town, having received an anonymous donation for its care, used a part of the donation for its restoration in 2008. The before-and-after views, above, of Tompkins Corners show how well the donation was spent.

Before he died in March 2013, Harry arranged for someone to investigate how much money would be required to restore the Adams Corners cemetery, and he made a will to include a sufficient amount for Grace Church to do the job.

The Adams Corners Cemetery has existed for well over 200 years. Writing in 1886, William F. Pelletreau described its genesis:

In quite early times, tradition states that Richard Curry came up to the Peekskill Hollow from White Plains. He traveled on horseback with his wife, bringing all his worldly goods with him, and settled below Adams Corners. While sitting one summer day, with a young child between his knees, a flash of lightning killed the child instantly, leaving the father unharmed. The young victim of the 'fires from hell' was buried on the hill, on the west side of the road, and from that time to the present this place has been the village cemetery..."

The oldest marked grave dates from 1794, but, again according to Pelletreau, the title to the cemetery was uncertain for a long time. In 1842, Charles Adams and others sold the land for a nominal sum to the trustees of the Methodist Church of the Philipstown Circuit in Putnam Valley "...for the use of a burial ground for the neighborhood, and for all other persons, whom the party of the second part (the trustees) may permit to be buried there." For many years, the cemetery was in the



care of the Methodist Church at Canopus (on Church Road near Croft Corners), which later combined with the church at Oregon Corners to become Grace Church.

Upon learning of the Silleck legacy, Grace went right to work. Doris Crowder contacted Jonathan Appell, the gravestone restorer who had conducted cemetery restoration workshops at Tompkins Corners in 2007. He was engaged to do much of the work, and Kayleigh Harnett a parishioner at Grace, worked with her family

and with Jonathan to complete the job. This project was part of her gold award project, the highest award for Girl Scouts.

In addition to the interesting, but mysterious, gravestone of Phebe Lehman, "a princess", who married Andrew Barger, there are other early Putnam Valley families at rest there: the Adamases, Armstrongs, Averys, Bargers (lots) , Tompkins (lots, too), Crawford, Dusenburys, Gillettes, Chapmans, Christians, Odells, Pierces, Traveses and more. Ron Petersen provided us with a map to enable descendants to find the stones of their forebears. Persons interested in researching their Putnam Valley ancestors are encouraged to consult Ron's extensive research collection which he deposited in the Putnam County Archives. Descendants visiting the Adams Corners Cemetery will be pleased to see its condition today.

JOIN THE SOCIETY OR

RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP FOR 2015 TODAY!

2015 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Here's our board of directors for this year. If you have ideas of programs you would like to see or would like to become more active in the society (we hope), contact one of them or our director Kelley Howard at pvhistoricalsociety@verizon.net or at 845-528-2097. There is interesting work for all!

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NEW COUNTY HISTORIAN

There's new leadership in the County Historian's Office. Dr. Sarah Johnson was appointed by County Executive MaryEllen Odell in November to fill the vacancy created by the death of Denis Castelli in April. Dr. Johnson, a native of Iowa, comes with impressive historical credentials and has hit the ground running. Putnam Valley's Sallie Sypher continues to volunteer as Deputy Historian, and Reg White is still County Archivist.

Come visit us in Brewster at 68 Marvin Avenue!

SUMMER EXHIBIT TO FEATURE PUTNAM'S NATIVE AMERICANS

The tragic story of what happened to the Wappingers of southern Dutchess County (that's us) in the 18th century will be told in an exhibit what will open at the Adams Corners Museum on May 2nd from 10 to 2. It will feature an exhibit panels created by the Putnam County Historian's Office and Indian artifacts collected by the Putnam County Historical Society (now the Putnam History Museum) that are now a part of this traveling exhibit. The show will be augmented by information and artifacts that are specific to Putnam Valley.

History books tell us a lot about how the Native Americans were treated from the very beginnings of European settlement in Virginia and Massachusetts, the forced relocations under President Andrew Jackson, the Indian Wars of the 19th century, and the frightful conditions on many reservations today. But somehow, we learn little



from books about what happened right here, how the Wappingers were defrauded of their land, how Daniel Nimham went to London – unsuccessfully - to right a wrong; how the Wappingers fought and died in battle less than 30 miles from here in the Patriot cause during the Revolution, and how even their heroism earned them no reward when the war was won. You will learn all this and also about where they went after the Revolution and are today.

If you have acquired any artifacts (projectile points, pottery shards, etc.) that were found in or are somehow tied to Putnam Valley and are willing to share them temporarily for this exhibit, please contact our director Kelley Howard at pvhistoricalociety@verizon.net. or 845-528-1024.

GOT PICTURES?

Do you have photographs of old Putnam Valley (yes, that includes the 20th century) or of Putnam Valleyites of prior years, and if you are willing to share them temporarily so that they can be scanned for future generations to enjoy, how about lending them to us for scanning? We promise to be careful, to return them in good (or better) shape, and give you a scan to keep. How's that for a deal?

YOUR DUES ARE NOW DUE FOR 2015

Name(s) _____

Address: _____

Phone: () _____

E-mail _____

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Single \$15 | <input type="checkbox"/> Sustainer \$50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family \$25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Patron \$100 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior \$ 10 | <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor \$250 <input type="checkbox"/> Senior couple \$15 |

Additional contribution to the Endowment _____ (if in memory or honor of someone, please state on your check.)

Make your deductible checks payable to the Putnam Valley Historical Society, P.O. Box 297, Putnam Valley, NY 10579-2097.