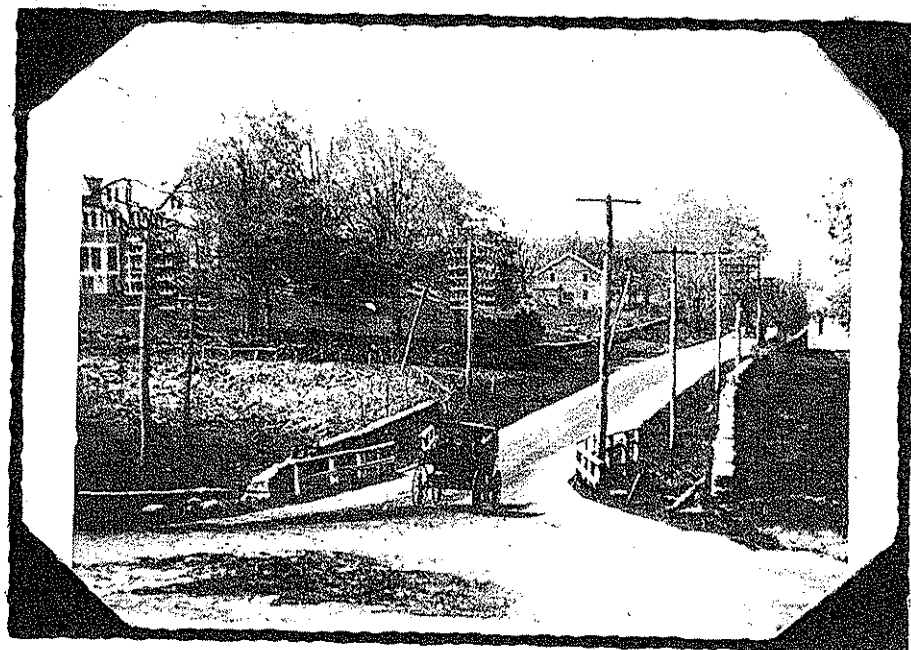


# North Castle History

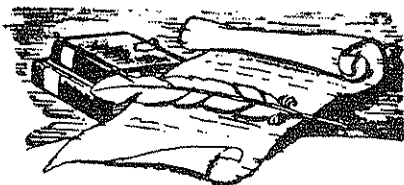


*State Road over Bear Gutter Creek looking South from Pfister's Store, Kensico, around 1900.*

# *The North Castle Historical Society*

Bedford Road, Armonk, New York 10504

## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**



*Dear Members and Friends,*

As I write this message, the Society's Youth Committee has just completed a very successfull "Crafts Fair" on the Smith's Tavern grounds for the fourth graders of the Byram Hills School District. I make this judgment, based on witnessing the enthusiasm of the children as they went from exhibit to exhibit — listening, participating, even sampling. History was being presented in a "come alive" way that would have been difficult to duplicate in the classroom.

The restoration work on the early kitchen and the small "red" bedroom is almost completed. Soon you will be able to see the results of the efforts of the House Committee and the Restoration Committee. Some of the history of Smith's Tavern will come alive before your eyes.

The current exhibition at the Tavern is based on early colonial crafts. A unique feature will be the demonstrations to be given by various people skilled in each of the crafts featured. Come, learn how it is done — maybe even pick up a new hobby.

As you probably know from reading the papers, your Society is currently exploring the possibility of adding two historic buildings to the present Tavern site. It is too soon to say more than that we are optimistically hopeful.

The above is just a vignette of current activities. There is plenty to do and a variety of opportunities for involvement. If you have some spare time and an interest in preserving and promulgating local history, let us hear from you. Somewhere in the wide range of our current activities there is a place just waiting for you. Come, get involved.

Sincerely,

Guy H. Papale



## The History of Kensico and Its Inundation

by Neil S. Martin

Each minute, 335,000 gallons of cool mountain water push their way into the northwestern depths of the Kensico Reservoir, flowing from the subsurface mouth of the 17½-foot wide Catskill Aqueduct at a steady 2½ miles an hour.

On the eastern side, the Rye Lake arm, the newer Delaware Aqueduct delivers 599,000 gallons every minute through an even larger opening. Together the two account for most of the 30 billion gallons that fill the 2,200-acre reservoir behind the masonry pile of the 66-year-old Kensico Dam.

There is a regular, if nearly imperceptible, drift through this enormous emergency canteen that replaced a much smaller man-made lake. As it pours into the upper end, the water is drawn off at the lower end for the faucets, fire hydrants and toilets of New York and southern Westchester.

And in its lazy passage through the reservoir, the water swirls over the silted remains of the little crossroads village for which the reservoir was named. Farms once flourished and mills turned here; generations were born, raised families and were buried.

There is a story, periodically revived, that fisherman skimming along the reservoir surface near the Rye Lake outlet can glimpse the shadowy steeple of Kensico's little Methodist church reaching up from the gloom. But there's no truth to this.

The church did not survive the flooding of the valley anymore than did Pfister's store, the Ravens' hotel, Joe Carpenter's blacksmith shop or the farm of Willis and Hattie Hustis. All we really have of that place and time are a few photographs and the memories of children grown old.

The valley lay white under a cold January moon as the horse drew the sleigh up the lakeside road. Except for the squeak of the runners and the muffled, regular clump of the horse's hooves in the snow, there was no sound. A little boy snuggled deeper under blankets and straw, between his bundled father, who held the reins, and his mother, who instinctively pulled the boy closer as she watched the valley slide by. A dog, curled around the boy's feet, bounced slightly when the runners caught a rut.

The boy's name was Eddie Ward, and he was going to see his Grandmother Carpenter and his aunts, uncles and cousins. They all lived at

the small crossroads called Kensico at the head of the lake. Eddie's mother, the former Olgee Green Carpenter, had grown up in Kensico and had married his father in its little Methodist church. Eddie couldn't tell you how his mother had gotten such an unusual name.

Eighty years later, Edmund F. Ward, a prolific illustrator and a former county supervisor, remembers the warmth and security of those winter trips to Kensico. He sketches the old roads with sure motions. "This is the State Road, which was unpaved then. It ran from White Plains to Valhalla to Kensico to Armonk and on up. The new road is Route 22. The road from Tarrytown came into the State Road here, at Kensico."

He draws little squares along the roads. "This was where the Reynolds family lived, on Reynolds Hill, overlooking the lake. Across the lake, here, was the Raven's hotel. Over here is where the school-house was, next to Uncle Joe's blacksmith shop. Next to that was Uncle Joe's house and right at the crossroads was Pfister's."

Pfister's store was the main meeting place in the Kensico of 1900. Jacob Pfister offered almost everything the valley's farm families needed, from flour, sugar and nails in huge barrels to kerosene for lamps. No one had electricity in Kensico.

The horse-drawn stage stopped at Pfister's twice a day in each direction as it wandered between the Kensico Station depot and Armonk, which everyone in Kensico referred to as "Monkeytown." The stage carried people, packages, newspapers and, most importantly, the U.S. mail.

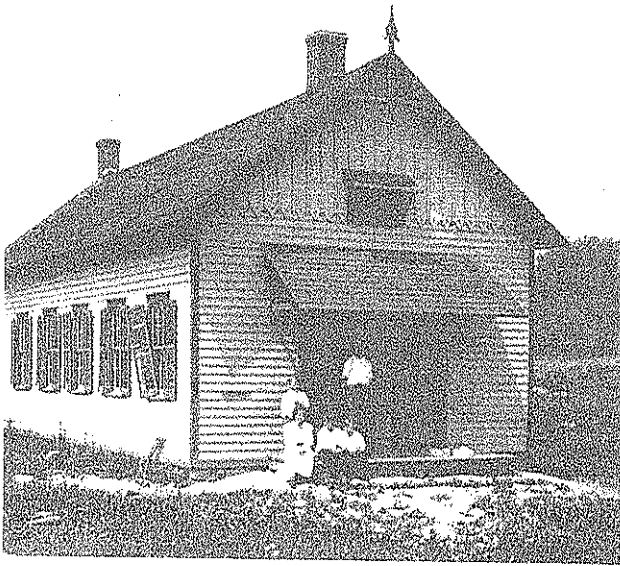
Jacob Pfister was also postmaster for this world of 200 or so souls and no telephones. Every day he handed the stage driver a bag of outgoing letters, each carrying his stamp: "Kensico, N.Y."

There was another store on the other side of the crossroads, owned by Clark Ryder who spent most of the time on his farm. A bell would ring when you stepped into Ryder's. A woman upstairs would holler out the window. Eventually, Ryder stalked in through the back way, his boots likely decorated with manure.

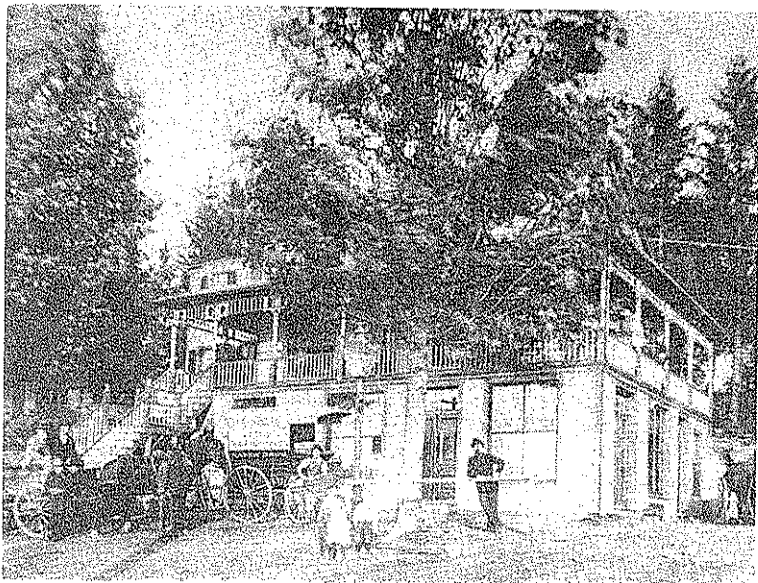
One day, a woman who did not know Ryder well, patiently waited for him to step behind the counter and then asked for a bottle of ink. Ryder asked if she would mind walking over to Pfister's for that. He had only one bottle of ink left and if he sold that, he explained, he'd have to order a whole new box, which was more trouble and expense than her business was worth.

Ryder also enjoyed the distinction of being a staunch Democrat in a community that strongly favored President McKinley, Rough Rider Teddy Roosevelt and the Republican Party in general.

One of the leading Republicans was Joe Carpenter, the blacksmith whose task it was to keep the valley's horses shod. The second floor of



At the head of Old Kensico Lake School District No. 6, Kensico, showing Left to right: Percy Pietschker, Anna Stonebanks Pietschker, J. Reynold Pietschker and Del Pietschker.



Raven's Hotel in the village of Kensico on the East side of Kensico Lake, about opposite today's Orchard St.

Joe's shop was a large meeting room, where campaign strategy would be debated. It was also where the men of Kensico did their duty each election day. Women, of course, were not allowed to vote until well after Kensico was no more.

Most of the people who met at Pfister's were farmers, like the Reynold's, who had a large dairy herd in the fields surrounding their gothic, towered mansion atop Reynolds Hill.

Florence Hustis loved her parents' farm, particularly the horses her father bought, sold and boarded. There was one chore she hated: pickling cucumbers. Come summer, she and her younger brother, Harry, would have to pull off thousands of the tiny gherkins which her father took to the pickling plant in White Plains. Sometimes she and Harry would fight in the hot garden. "If I got mad at my brother, I would have to say excuse me and apologize," Florence Hustis Griffen recalls now. "My mother never let us go to bed angry."



**Pfister's Store in the village of Kensico.**

Frequently, Florence would have to take one of her father's prized horses to Joe Carpenter for new shoes. Then she might walk down to the causeway that ran from the Rye Ponds into the lake. There she sometimes found John and Merve Krepps and their little cousin from White Plains, Eddie Ward. The boys often fished the lake, causeway and nearby Bear Gutter Creek for bass, eels and bullfrogs.

Listening to their teacher, Dolly Merritt, the children of Kensico tried to imagine what their crossroads looked like during the Revolution.

After the Battle of White Plains, George Washington met here with his officers, as the bruised American troops regrouped in the surrounding hills.

There was no lake at all then, and Kensico wasn't even called Kensico. Instead, it was Wright's Mills, named for the grist mill operated by Reuben Wright. Washington briefly used Wright's house as a headquarters and the British Major Andre was dragged through on his way to be hanged in Tappan. Wright's house is also believed to have been the site of the court-martial of the American Gen. Charles Lee, suspected of helping the British capture the fort named after him.



The Robbins-Wright house in Kensico (mill owners).

Other millers came and went and the crossroads was successively dubbed Fisher's Mills and Robbin's Mills. It was not until 1849 that the first post office was established, in a store operated by the Wyckoff family. That was when tavern owner Jotham Washington Tompkins proposed that the practice of naming the crossroads after mill owners cease and that the new post office be named for the Indian chief who sold most of the area surrounding White Plains to English settlers in the 1600s.

The need for a post office was evident. By the late 1840s, the valley boasted a grist mill, a cider mill, a felt hat factory, a textile mill and a dye works. The little Bronx River and Bear Gutter Creek supplied the water power.

The farmers had easy access to New York City's first railroad, which had pushed up the Bronx River. According to one story, the people of Kensico and Armonk opposed the railroad's extension through their communities, encouraging its builders to turn away from the valley and lay track up Davis Brook toward the Saw Mill River. The Davis Brook depot became known as Kensico Station. The post office there was called Valhalla to distinguish it from Kensico. Soon after the turn of the century, the station's name was also changed to Valhalla; too many mourners bound for Kensico Cemetery, further along the line, had been getting off at the wrong stop.

John and Caroline Raven came to the valley in the early 1870s not long after immigrating from Germany. Raven was from Berlin and his wife was from Kassel. They bought a farm along the river and converted the main house into a small hotel. It was then that engineers from New York City announced that they were about to build an earthen dam across the Bronx River and create the first small reservoir, to supply the old Westchester towns of Morrisania, Kingsbridge and West Farms after they were annexed by New York City.

The industrious Raven didn't hesitate. With teams of horses and oxen and dozens of men straining at ropes, the little hotel was rolled up the hill on logs to a point safe from the city's clutches.

It turned out that the little lake was a blessing for the large Raven family: dam workers boarded in the hotel and ate and drank in the tavern. Later, people would come to fish, boat and skate at the lake. The Ravens named their establishment the Lake View Hotel.

Dorothy Raven Draper, the youngest of the couple's 11 children and the only one still living, remembers how her father and brothers sawed blocks of ice from the lake to store in their ice house. The ice had to be carefully packed in sawdust to last through the summer.

Caroline Raven would search for people to work in the hotel among the immigrants stepping off the Ellis Island boats at the Battery. The Ravens usually hired people from their native country with whom they could converse easily. Farmers like Willis Hustis also hired hands at the Battery during busy seasons.

Because the Raven's hotel served beer, wine and hard liquor, it was not entirely welcome by many of the strict Methodists who populated Kensico. They regarded it as a "rum hole," even though the Ravens were members of their church and even though it was a saloonkeeper who had named their crossroads. "People could be very snooty in those days," one woman explained.

Most Kensico people did not go into New York often. The big annual outing was the church trip to Rye Beach. "It was a long buggy ride down King Street. By the time you got there, it was time to leave," says Florence Hustis Griffen, who would wear a blue bathing suit that



covered most of her body. Stockings were also required of female bathers.

Florence took art lessons, at 50 cents for each session, from Cora Carpenter, the blacksmith's sister and Eddie Ward's aunt. Cora was an expert painter of china which she baked in a large kiln in Eddie's grandmother's house. On rainy days, Eddie and his friends would paint with Cora and Florence.

When Florence was 20 and still living in Kensico, she did an oil portrait of a horse, which she later gave to her brother Harry. Years later, when Harry died, the picture could not be found. Many more years passed until the day, not long ago, that Florence's daughter walked into the White Plains Thrift Shop and saw the portrait of a horse hanging on a nail. It was signed "Florence Hustis, 1907."

It should be pointed out that Kensico has some claim to literary immortality. The valley is the setting of a rather lurid novel, *Within These Walls*, written by the prolific Rupert Hughes in 1923.

In the book, Hughes contrasts the evil of greedy, growing New York City with the purity and simplicity of Westchester's villages. The hero marries a beautiful young New Yorker amid a cholera epidemic and whisks her to safety on a Kensico farm. Alas, the city pursues them, building dams left and right in Westchester, destroying homes and farms, including, ultimately, their own Kensico homestead.

In between, the couple's little daughter is violated by a local no-good who is, in turn, killed by the husband and buried within the family's cellar walls. Later, the husband returns from a trip to Manhattan to find his wife in the arms of a longtime rival. His wife offers to commit suicide but things are patched up. One son dies in the Civil War, another traitorously becomes an engineer on the New Croton Dam. The times are marked by treachery, hard drinking and heartache.

At the end, the aged protagonist, RoBards, draws his remorseful engineer son to his side: "I had to see you, Keithie, to get one more promise from you before I go. The city, that infernal New York, will be demanding our farm for the bottom of one of its lakes before long.

"But don't let them have it! Fight 'em to the last ditch! And whatever you do, don't let 'em open the cellar walls.."

No one recalls any Kensico history to match Hughes' tale—except of course, that New York really did drown the valley.

Florence Hustis was 15 in 1902 when the engineers of "that infernal New York" drew up the basic plans for the Catskill water system. Over the next 15 years, only the construction of the Panama Canal overshadowed this incredible project.

The need was obvious. Even with the New Croton Dam then nearing completion, the exploding city population was outdrinking the water supply. Moreover, the city had four years earlier taken in the Bronx,

Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island, and New Croton could serve only Manhattan and the Bronx. A key argument for Greater New York was that creation of a single metropolitan government was necessary to plan and finance an adequate water supply for all the new boroughs, which had relied on well water when they were independent cities and towns.

The Catskill scheme called for construction of a huge reservoir at Ashokan in the Catskills, a smaller reservoir on Schoharie Creek connected to Ashokan, the large emergency reservoir at Kensico to replace the small lake and an equalizing reservoir at Hill View in Yonkers to balance the flow from the aqueduct against the fluctuating hourly thirst of the city. The Catskill Aqueduct would bore 93 miles through mountains, under streams and lakes and dive 1,000 feet into the bedrock beneath the Hudson River at Storm King. From Hill View, the water would be taken to each borough of the city by a cavernous tunnel driven entirely through the city's rock base.

"The news spread through Kensico like wildfire," Florence Hustis Griffen recalls. The people could not believe the maps they were shown, outlining a reservoir covering 10 times the surface of the small lake they knew. The 1,800-foot-long, 160-foot-high dam would raise the water level an incredible 100 feet up the slopes of Reynolds' Hill, Cooney Hill and Ackerley's Hill. Archer's Hill, where the family of that name had farmed for generations, would be turned into an island! The Rye Ponds would be completely flooded. All but a few hilltop farms would be taken and the crossroads where Washington's officers convened would be put under many feet of water. Church, school, stores, blacksmith shop, hotel, all would be razed.

Kensico made little effort to stop the plans. "People whose homes were taken objected to it, of course, but there was no organized opposition," is the way Edmund Ward remembers it. "They figured New York had to have the water and it was no use kicking against the prickles, as it were. And I think people got a decent value for the land...Still, the city was drowning out an entire community."

One must remember that the early 1900s were a time of exciting change. The young people of Kensico, who had grown up much as their Civil War ancestors had, could sense that the inventions of Bell, Edison, the Wrights and Duryea were about to change their lives as they were changing the lives of those in the cities. People were more receptive to accelerating progress—the Briarcliff Trophy Race that tore through Kensico in 1908 was a grand demonstration of the qualities of the automobile—and most did not feel overwhelmed by change as many people do today.

But Florence Hustis Griffen still feels the loss of Kensico. "The most glorious times of my life were spent in that picture," she says, pointing to a large photograph of her parents' farm. "The city of New York came

and ruined everything. And they never gave the farmers what their land was really worth." Asked if her father considered fighting the city on his own, she says, "He didn't believe in lawsuits."

Increasingly fearful of drought and disease, New York City won quick approval from the state legislature to take what lands it needed at Kensico; special three-man commissions were to decide on "fair prices" for landowners. In 1905, the bonding legislation was passed, in 1906 final state planning approval was won. And in 1907, at Garrison in Putnam County, New York City Mayor John McClellan celebrated the beginning of construction of the aqueduct.

First to sell his Kensico land was John Raven. But not to the city. To the Jennie Clarkson Home for Children, which built on the high land unaffected by the city's plans. "I have raised all my children here," he told friends in 1904. "If the Jennie Clarkson people think it can help their children, they should have it." The hotel was used as a temporary children's home before it was burned as a fiery prop for an early motion picture. Unfortunately, no one seems to remember the name of the film.

When John Wyckoff moved to Connecticut in 1906, taking his family's name out of the valley for the first time in 100 years, the church had to search for a new treasurer.

Belle Miller, another of Joe Carpenter's sisters and head of the Ladies' Aid Society, finally prevailed on C. Frank Reynolds to take over. This was a surprising choice because Reynolds, who had inherited the dairy farm on Reynolds' Hill, was not even a member of the Kensico church. Belle explained: "Frank, the city is going to take the church property in the next few years and there will be quite a sum of money to handle. As you have a farm, we do not believe you will run away with the money."

Reynolds, who appreciated Belle's direct approach, found the city had set up a \$2,500 fund for care of the church before taking the property. With this, he and the ladies put on a new roof, redecorated the inside, varnished the pews, bought a new red carpet from Sloane's and put in a hot-air furnace.

But the people who gathered at Pfister's saw no point to investing money in a doomed church. When Reynolds went to Pfister's for his mail he was greeted like this: "Here comes the Ladies' Aid man. He does anything the women want him to do. He even believes in women's suffrage and he spends money on a building that's going to be torn down soon because they say so."

The jokers choked when the city commissioners awarded the church a whopping \$21,000 for its improved property, 50 percent more than the most optimistic church member had dared predict. People began painting and rebuilding all through the valley. Years later Reynolds

quietly observed, "The city of New York was always most fair and considerate of the church."

Life did not suddenly stop in Kensico, it ebbed away slowly as the city bought up the farms and prepared the valley basin for the coming of the dam.

By the end of 1909, all but a few farmers were gone. Jacob Pfister closed the Kensico post office for good and moved his store into Valhalla. Joe Carpenter followed with his forge. The Ravens had already set up house in Armonk. The Krepps' moved into White Plains where their father, Virgil, was president of the street car line linking White Plains with Mamaroneck and Tarrytown. Eventually, John Krepps would become president of the Home Savings Bank.

Florence's family also moved to White Plains before buying a new farm in upstate Chemung. Florence stayed in White Plains and married Chauncey Griffen, a future mayor of that city. But it was a sad day for Florence when the city began dismantling the old farm buildings. "My father was so honest he wouldn't even keep the weathervane when the city bought the farm. It was in the shape of a horse."

The city's contractors began building the new highways to replace the old roads to be flooded. At the same time, sections of hills were carved out to better shape the reservoir while soft, swampy areas were filled in. A mammoth cut was made toward the Rye Ponds, to be spanned by a bridge carrying the new State Road. And in the summer of 1910, Eddie Ward found himself working as an assistant surveyor on the reservoir project that was to flood his old haunts. He gladly took the job, needing money to go to art school, even though it meant hot, sweaty days plodding through the fill.

Many of the buildings of Kensico were simply knocked down and burned. Dorothy Raven Draper remembers one story of a man watching demolition workers put the torch to his old house. As the flames rose, he suddenly blanched. "My money, it's where I always keep it. In the bed. In there." But other structures were carefully dismantled, some of the wood and stone ending up in new houses in Valhalla, particularly in the Shelly Park development.

Barely a dozen families attended the last Sunday service at the Kensico church. Before the steeple was demolished, the bell and the furnace were taken to the Valhalla Methodist Church. The cornerstone and furniture went to the Castle Heights Methodist Church in North White Plains. Much of the money from the city was used in improving the Valhalla Church; the man who designed the bridge over the new Rye Lake outlet was hired as the church architect.

New York City's main Kensico contractor slowly built up a great work camp at Valhalla for the 1,500 men who would work on the dam at the height of construction. The Water Supply board created a mounted

police force to keep order. Railroad tracks and overhead trams were built to Quarry Heights in North Castle and Harrison, where the rock for concrete was to be blasted out and crushed. And as Eddie Ward trudged through the basin fill, work crews, made up largely of Italian immigrants who would settle permanently in the area, began the long task of digging straight down through 50 yards of earth and rotten rock to the tough Fordham gneiss in which the dam would sit.

This entailed months of blasting, leading to a number of fatal accidents. The worst occurred while a crew was inserting charges into newly drilled holes. Not realizing the power was on, a blasting supervisor demonstrated to a visitor how the switch worked. Five men died in the ensuing explosion.

Many more men died working on the aqueduct than on the dam, 11 killed in a premature blast in a shaft near Cold Spring. Men weren't the only casualties. In 1907, the city had to settle with a Westchester farmer whose cow ate several sticks of dynamite.

As the aqueduct neared completion in 1913, the work gangs at Kensico began laying the first of the cyclopedian concrete bricks of which the dam is built. In one month, 2.5 million cubic yards of concrete were poured into blocks, which had to cure for three months before being swung onto the rising hyperbolic pile of the dam. What one sees of the dam today above the ground level is about half of its height and a third of its mass.

For three years, the work crews sweated and heaved the huge blocks, as 16 switch engines chugged back and forth. The Ashokan Reservoir was completed in 1915 and the water tunnel through the city was given its final inspection that same year.

Then, in the fall of 1916—as Woodrow Wilson won re-election by promising to keep America neutral—the Kensico Dam was declared finished, four years ahead of schedule and 14 years after the crossroads community first learned of its fate.

As the Catskill water flowed into the abandoned valley, the line of the lake slowly shifted and enlarged. The old State Road disappeared. The foundations of the Krepps, Raven and Carpenter houses went under. The remains of the Hustis farm were flooded along with the narrow western road to Armonk.

By the following January, on the eve of the nation's entry into the Great War, the valley was filled.

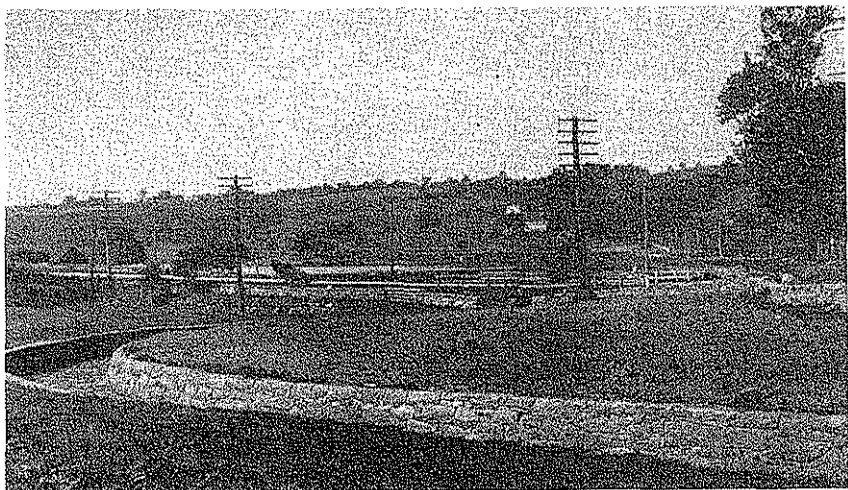
At the end of 1917, civilian traffic was barred from the road built across the dam. Stern young soldiers who patrolled the road each night would peer down the steep plunging dam face to the plaza as the lights of White Plains winked beyond.

A private might repeat the story he had heard about an old church in the village flooded by the reservoir, that if one took a boat out, one

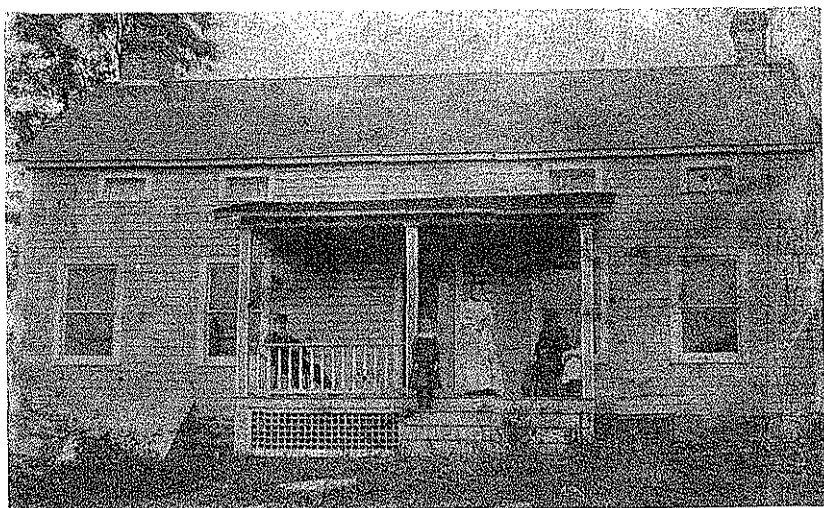
could catch a glimpse of its steeple reaching up from the depths. The others would grunt.

Behind them stretched the deep, black expanse; tiny waves lapped at the stonework just below their feet.

"The Lost Village" has been reprinted through the courtesy of the Gannett Westchester Newspapers, having appeared in their Sunday Section G issue of August 12, 1979.



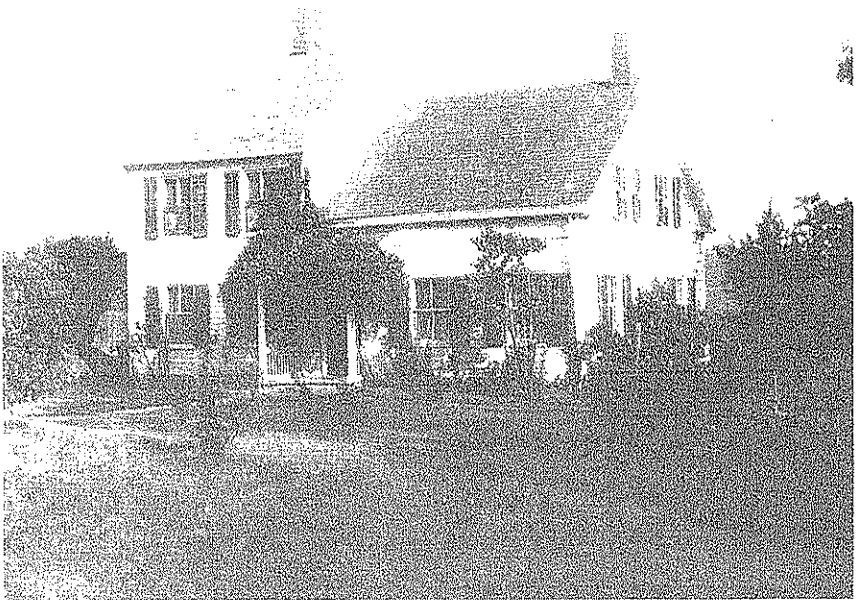
Bear Gutter Creek at entrance to Old Kensico Lake between Pfister's store and the Methodist church.



The Frank Riley house on the peninsula in Kensico.



Old Kensico Lake looking south showing the old State Road which was relocated to the east side of the lake.



Front view of Arthur Pietschker's home on the old road up the peninsula, taken in 1908.





## KENSICO A Special Place

by Del Pietschker

You might say that the Kensico Reservoir and I grew up together. It has always been a part of my life, for I was born not far from the village of Kensico. When I was 8 years old my parent's home and property were purchased by New York City in preparation for the new reservoir.

I remember the village of Kensico as a small, quiet community — a secure little hamlet nestled in the valley below the North Castle hills.

Prior to 1885 the road to Armonk ran up through the center of the present reservoir and up the center of the peninsula that you see on your left as you cross the Rye Lake Bridge going north. My family's property was located on this peninsula. Along this road from Valhalla to Armonk were homes and farmlands, and about a quarter mile south of the Rye Lake Bridge, in the center of the reservoir — approximately one hundred feet down — was the village of Kensico. It was comprised of small groups of houses close together, a church, a couple of stores, a mill, post office, blacksmith shop and school (see detailed map). A brook, called Bear Gutter Creek, ran from Armonk down through the center of the village and on down to Valhalla where it joined with Davis Brook at the Harlem Railroad. Davis Brook still runs through Valhalla.

### **The First Reservoir**

When New York City needed a new source of drinking water they bought property south of the center of Kensico and in 1885 completed what is referred to on the map as the Old Kensico Lake with a small earthen dam complete with a stone and concrete spillway in the center. This dam was about one quarter the height of the present dam.

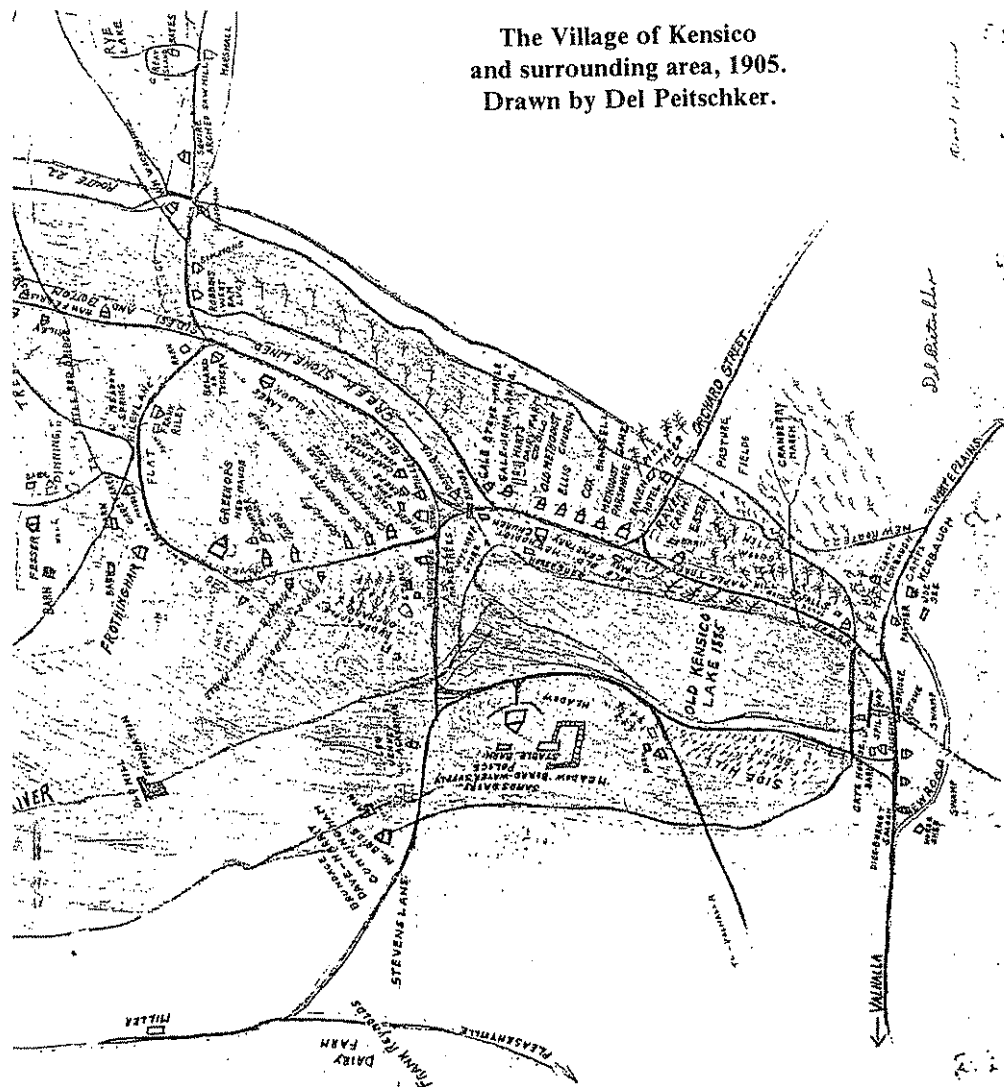
### **The Reservoir is Enlarged**

Shortly after the turn of the century New York City realized still more water was needed for the growing city. By 1905 plans were underway to build the present reservoir and dam in conjunction with a series of connecting waterways coming from the Catskill Mountains. The village of Kensico and the area surrounding it were condemned, and one by one the families moved and their homes taken down until there was nothing left of the historic village.

Originally plans called for the new dam to be built in front of the old earthen dam so that water usage from the old lake would not be disrupted. However, no solid rock could be found as a base to hold the dam and therefore they had to build behind the old dam, which meant emptying the old lake first.

Read to figure

Deel Pieter Klaas





After much preliminary work, the construction of the dam began in 1913. Built by H.S. Kerbaugh Co., it required approximately 17 miles of rail system, an electric plant, sand and gravel pits, quarry stone crushers, cement mixers, and cableways. Completed in 1917 — 3 years ahead of schedule — the dam is 308 feet high (128' above ground, 180' below). It is 1,843' in length — part in the Town of Mt. Pleasant (Valhalla), and part in the Town of North Castle (North White Plains). It is faced with granite which was obtained from a nearby quarry.<sup>1</sup> It contains two large halls, or tunnels, which go from one end to the other, one near the top, the other near the bottom. These halls are connected on each end by stairways and are watched very carefully for any structural damage. The reservoir itself covers approximately 2,200 acres of land, divided about equally between the two towns, and holds approximately 30 billion gallons of water.

### A New Life

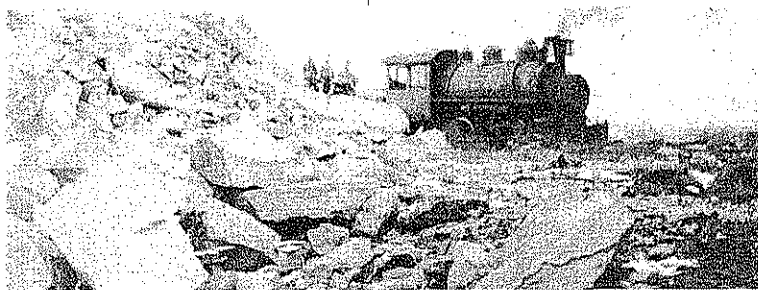
Most of the Kensico families stayed in the area, settling in Valhalla, North White Plains or Armonk, where they began a new life. My family settled in North White Plains where my father continued to do painting and contracting work.

Many of the more than 1,000 construction workers and their families also stayed in the area, and North White Plains grew into quite a sizeable community.

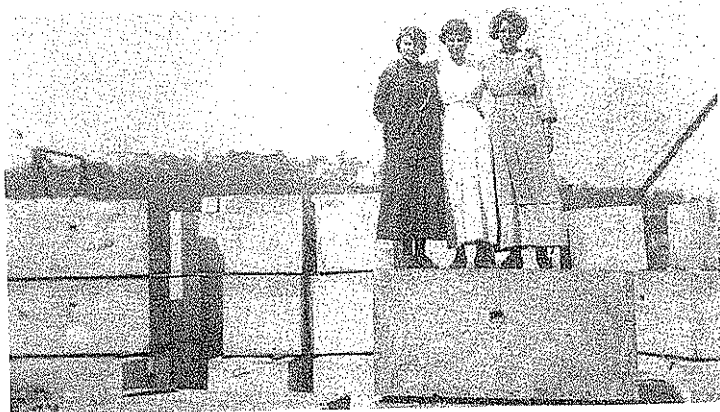
Eventually things settled down and the former Kensico residents became accustomed to the beautiful body of water that covered their former town. Fortunately, my father's property, although confiscated, was not flooded, and today on the peninsula the house foundation can be seen with other foundations along the old colonial road that winds its way up the peninsula. Although many trees now cover the land, with a little imagination you can visualize what the area was like and what was lost to the citizens of Kensico.

#### FOOTNOTE:

1. The quarry in the present area of Quarry Heights in Harrison and North Castle was the source of this granite.



Train picking up quarry stone in Quarry Heights.



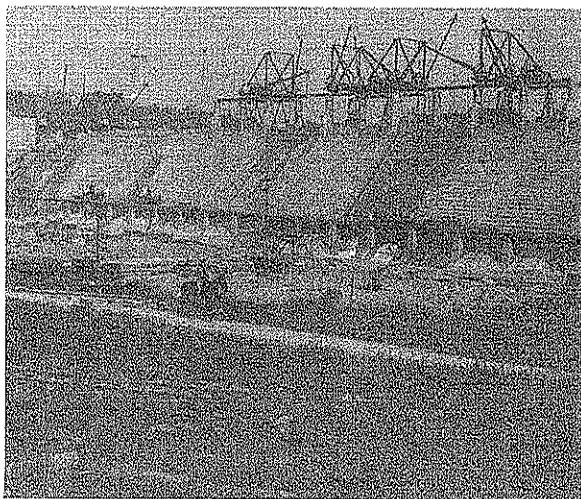
Concrete blocks used to build the dam. Left to right: Alice Jones, Pearl Pietschker and Orphelia Swenson.



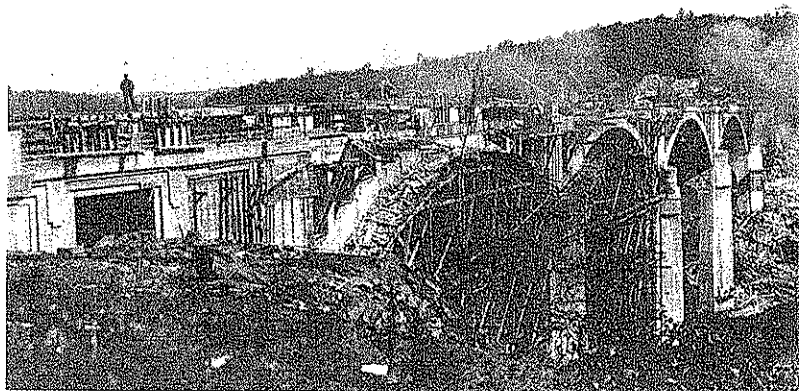
Campsite for construction workers in Clove Road area of North White Plains.



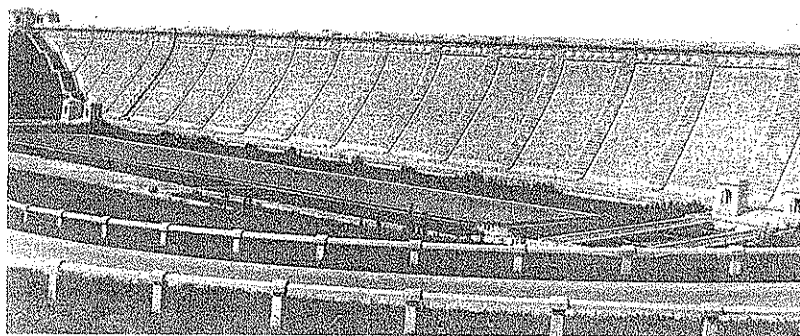
Building the new Kensico Dam.



Construction of Kensico Dam.



Construction of Rye Bridge, Route 22.



Kensico Dam

## THE BUILDING OF KENSICO DAM

by Ruth Draper Dalrymple

"Seldom has practical utility produced such resulant beauty," Alvah P. French.

Most Westchester residents will agree with French's description of the Kensico Dam at Valhalla, New York. Yet, it is hard to imagine that the residents of the old Kensico village shared these feelings as they stood on the surrounding hillsides and watched the remains of their homes disappear under the waters of Kensico Lake.

The Women's Club of Valhalla, through its Civic and Public Affairs Committee established a local history section in an attempt to implement the resource and photographic material presently available in the local library and schools. All research about the Valhalla-Kensico area sooner or later breaks down to "before" or "after" construction of the present Kensico Dam. Most of the older folks interviewed did not actually live in the old village of Kensico, but the entire surrounding area was profoundly affected by the change.

When the original small earth dam and spillway was completed in 1885 to store the waters of the Bronx and Byram rivers, it inconvenienced a minimum number of families and businesses—most simply moved to higher ground. The potential of the area was tremendous. In addition to the usual farm buildings, homes, church and stores found in any rural town of the era, Kensico's geographic location and proximity to the Harlem Railroad in Valhalla made it attractive for business as well. The old State Road which ran through the village was a main artery for north-south travel and the Upper Cross Road (Stevens Avenue) at one time provided an east-west route from the shores of Connecticut to the banks of the Hudson River in Tarrytown, portions of it dating back to the Indians, who called it the "Otter Trail." Through the years Kensico (formerly Robbins' Mills, Fisher's Mills and earlier, Wright's Mills) flourished with mills, factories and other businesses, while the "lower neighborhood" of Davis Brook (Valhalla) was a settlement of the few farms. The extension of the Harlem Railroad through Valhalla in 1845 created a small business area in the vicinity of the station and in 1850 a stage line for mail and passengers was established between Valhalla, Kensico, Armonk (Mile Square) and Banksville.

Plans were submitted by the New York Board of Water Supply in 1905 to increase the water supply to New York City via a system of reservoirs and a great aqueduct, including construction of the new Kensico Dam to create a storage reservoir for emergencies. Preliminary surveys for the Kensico site were begun in 1906.

It is easy to see why this location was chosen, as it readily met the re-

quirements for construction. As an emergency distributing area it had to be near enough for the most economic laying of additional pipes for quick delivery to the city; there was a minimum of expense in highways to be shifted and dwellings and other structures to be moved in this sparsely populated area; and, the topography of the site was ideal for economic construction of a dam because the hill ranges on either side of the wide valley approach each other, forming a narrow gorge at the proposed location, between hills of almost solid rock.

Originally, the engineers planned to use a site immediately below the old dam so that the water could be held in check while the new dam was being built. However, test borings proved the area to be worthless for a dam foundation and the project was moved just north of the original dam. This incurred the additional expense of draining the old reservoir and yet maintaining a means of continuing a supply of water to the Bronx. The Rye dike was subsequently built at Rye Pond and in August, 1911, the waters were drawn off at Kensico and the fish transferred to Rye Lake and Grassy Sprain Lake.

The reaction of the residents of Kensico to the realization that their little community would be wiped out completely is interesting. Some sold out immediately, others held out to the bitter end through legal procedures and were almost forcibly ejected. In a report of the history of the Methodist Church, one of the former trustees described how they repaired, painted and cared for their property, as though demolition was not imminent, and thus increased the appraisal value of the property when it was inspected by the commissioners. Some of the residents noted the success of this method and followed suit. The majority simply followed the course of least resistance, awaited the decision of the commissioners, accepted their award and moved away.

Acquisition of property, diversion of the waters, relocation of highways and preparation of the site for construction constituted the largest portion of the project. Many supplementary units had to be constructed first, including a private railroad system, electric plant, sand pit, quarry, crushing plant, mixers, block storage yard and a system of cableways. Actual construction of the dam proper did not start until 1913.

The contract with the H.S. Kerbaugh Company stipulated housing for the large number of workmen imported for the project. The work camp was supplied with water, sewerage, a small hospital and a school for the children of the employees—all erected at North White Plains by the contractor and maintained during construction. Mrs. Amos Struble, retired Westchester Historical Society's librarian, recalls that her husband was employed as a teacher for an adult evening school to teach the immigrants how to read and write. The camp school was a forerunner to the North White Plains elementary school which was subsequently



made a part of Union Free School District No. 5 in Valhalla.

The railroad system provided by the contractors was the connecting link between all of the construction units and the dam proper. There were 17 miles of track, 16 steam-operated locomotives, flat cars and dumping cars. The mile-long double track section leading to the dam from the quarry crossed over three high trestles en route.

An electric plant supplied power to all of the apparatus except the railroad and steam shovels. In addition to the 45,000 volt current supplied by the New York Edison Company at the site, the electric plant had two supplementary 15,000 volt lines from New Rochelle and Ossining as a safety factor, in case of failure of the main line. Transformers in the power house and in the field graduated the current down to 440, 220 and 110 volts. There were also two powerful air compressors located near the block yard.

Sand pits were located at the west end of the lake, where the sand was excavated and transported by conveyors.

A stroke of pure luck placed some of the finest granite in the country at the quarry site only a mile east of the dam and this was used for all of the concrete work as well as the dimension stones used as a facing at the front of the dam. After being dynamited, the loose rock was lifted by steam shovel to the cars, which carried it to a crusher, while derricks were used to select stones of suitable size for the cyclopean masonry and facing.

The crusher itself was a most important feature of the quarry operations—a series of conveyor belts and hoppers was able to process as much as 250 tons of stone per hour. Cars dumped loads of stone into the main hopper, which reduced it to 10", passed by gravity into a second crusher, reducing the stone to 4", and passing on to the foot of the continuous bucket elevator, which then lifted it to huge screens for grading. A belt conveyor delivered the proper size stones to storage bins and the oversize stones to rollers to be crushed again. The bins were adjacent to the tracks and had hopper bottoms over the tracks so that the cars could be filled and the crushed rock conveyed to the dam site or the mixing plant.

A complicated electric mixing device employing chutes and collapsible steel forms filled three forms simultaneously and as the mixer moved ahead the process was repeated. The complete cycle required 2½ days from the initial mixing process to delivery to the block yard, just below the dam. A seasoning period of three months was necessary before the huge blocks could be put into the dam, so each block had to be date-marked to judge the seasoning time.

There was an extensive cableway system used for hoisting the derricks and excavating the bottom of the gorge. Supporting towers at each end were 50' x 100' at the base and 125' high from the top of the rail.

Each of the electrically operated cableways had a capacity of 10-15 tons and played an important part in the exceptional speed with which construction was completed. A series of photographs in a cement company's advertisement shows progress from ground level to rough completion at the full height of the dam from March to December, 1914! The ad states that 500,000 barrels of cement were used in this portion of the construction.

The visible part of the dam, 126' above the foundation is only about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of its actual size, the major portion being underground. Engineers blasted down to bed rock for the foundation and this, plus the system of controls, and a unique expansion joint method of construction, makes the structure practically indestructible.

Naturally, in a construction project of this size there were many accidents, some of them fatal, and recollections of the number of lives lost vary with the tale. At one time during the blasting operations workmen on the east side of the dam were drilling holes and loading them with charge prior to dynamiting a section, each charge being connected by wire to a main switch. An assistant superintendent was instructing a new man in the method of firing the charges and, not realizing that the section was already connected, carelessly demonstrated the procedure for activating the main switch. The charge exploded, killing five men who were working in the area.

Concrete was laid between bulkheads at the bottom of the gorge and guy derricks on each side placed the buckets of concrete and huge stones for the masonry work. The bulkheads were moved as construction progressed and as the masonry rose, the derricks had to be moved to concrete piers that were incorporated in the structure. As many as six derricks were kept at work during this phase. When the structure had reached a considerable distance above the main foundation, eight travelling derricks completed the process.

Although the original contract called for completion by 1920, the methods used were so efficient that the dam itself was completed and the basin filled by 1917. Mountains of statistics are available regarding actual construction, and copies of the contract are available at the White Plains Public Library. Various resources place cost figures at just under \$8,000,000 to \$158,000,000, depending on whether reference is to the dam itself, or the entire project, including the extensive landscaping and other additional work not covered in the original contract.

A glass plate negative made in 1885 produced a clear photograph of the village portion of Valhalla with but six houses in the entire area—one of these being the gatekeeper's house at the head of the original dam. However, the picture changed dramatically when the Board of Water Supply had to increase the capacity of its water system to meet the growing needs of New York City.

The tremendous influx of workers provided a period of prosperity for the entire surrounding area, especially the little hamlet of Valhalla. New stores, rooming houses, hotels, restaurants and saloons mushroomed to meet the needs of the workers and their families. The New York Board of Water Supply provided a mounted patrol of more than 20 men who acted as guards for the structure, with precincts in Kensico and Valhalla. Many of the construction families remained in the area after completion of the dam, contributing to the growth and character of Valhalla and its environs. Dr. Lawrence, the camp physician, moved his practice to White Plains and became an outstanding obstetrician. The principal of the camp school, Mr. George Remsen, became principal of the North White Plains Elementary School when the camp was abolished. Some of the places of business remained after completion of the Dam, but gradually most found that the normal population of the area could not support them.

The original landscaping program for the Kensico Dam and Reservoir has resulted in a beautiful park-like setting and people come from many miles away to enjoy it. Years ago there were fountains in the pool at the base of the dam and the town recreation program included beginners' swimming in the little side pools. However, during the war years the dam was under constant guard and eventually the area was prohibited to the public. The plaza area immediately below and in front of the dam was acquired by Westchester County in the mid-60's and is available to the public once more under the supervision of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation. Presently the plaza and roadways below the dam are undergoing reconstruction in order to further enhance the area.

The Women's Club of Valhalla and the North Castle Historical Society hope to interest historians and former residents of the area in providing material for their resource files and photographic displays, either on a loan basis for reproduction, or as a donation.

Mrs. Dalrymple's mother is Dorothy Raven Draper whose mother and father owned the Lake View Hotel in Kensico. The family moved to a farm on Old Post Rd. just below Armonk Village. Her brother, Julius Raven, later purchased the Northeast corner of Bedford Rd. and Main St. (presently the Olive Branch Restaurant) where he opened a restaurant and roadside business. He was prominent in local affairs and a member and president of the 1st consolidated Board of Education in Armonk. He later served for many years as Justice of the Peace of North Castle.

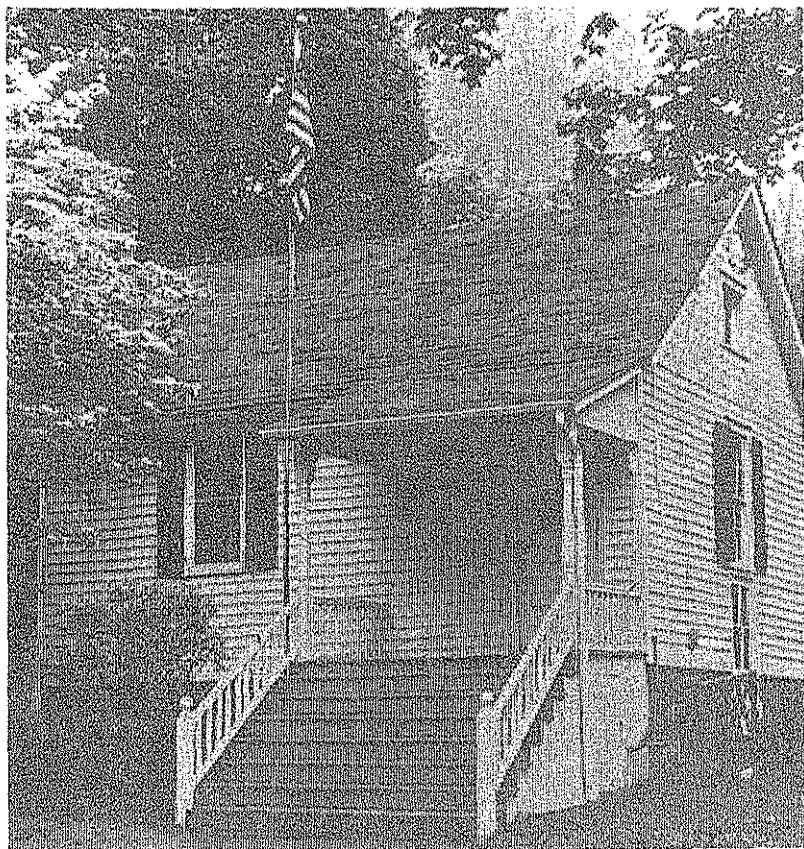
We are most grateful to the Westchester County Historical Society for allowing us to reprint "The Building of Kensico Dam" from their Quarterly Bulletin, Vol. 42, No. 1, pg. 1, Winter, 1966, Ed. Renoda Hoffman. We have taken the liberty, with permission, to make slight modifications in order to bring the article up to date. Mrs. Dalrymple expressed her appreciation in the Quarterly Bulletin to the members of the Westchester County Historical Society and others who helped her assemble much information for the original article.

## NORTH CASTLE SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 1



by Hope Weil Levene

The history of a schoolhouse lives in the memory of students who recall their teachers, classmates and special moments in their early lives. The East Middle Patent School (No. Castle School District No. 1), a tiny one-room building in the far eastern section of the Town of North Castle, still stands, though barely, and is still alive and important to many who remember their early childhood confrontation with education, and their teacher.



East Middle Patent School, 1961.

This is the story of a school, gathered from former pupils, trustees, newspaper accounts and early records. "Mrs. Lanfair was the East Middle Patent School," was the first thing Jessamin Finch Jarvis said when asked about her school days. The school, one of the last of its kind still standing, is located less than forty miles from New York City, one of the world's largest and most important educational and cultural centers. Situated near the corner of East Middle Patent Road and Mianus River Road, with not a house in sight, it is a reminder of the importance of rural schools before the days of the yellow school bus.

Common (public) schools were established in New York State by legislative act in 1812. The first East Middle Patent School was on a tiny plot of land — just large enough for the building.<sup>1</sup> When that school burned down, a second one was built. The earliest record found to date is a deed of May 31, 1900 transferring "one acre, more or less," from Jane A. Finch to Albert Hobby, Alexander Hobby and James Reynolds as trustees of School District No. 1. \$50 was paid with the stipulation to "quietly enjoy" the property that was "free from encumbrances."<sup>2</sup>

The first student we know about was Victor Finch,<sup>3</sup> who, according to his wife, now in her 90's, attended at the turn of the century. His daughter, Jessamin, followed in 1938, one of two students in her class, with a total of eight in the school.

Richard Miller, who was born in 1897, started school there when he was six years old and attended all the grades. During that period the school was moved back from the edge of the road to its present location. There were four teachers during those years, each one boarding at a different home in the area and walking along the dirt roads to school. Mr. Miller laughed when he recalled Elvin Chase, his most memorable teacher, a big man with a paunch that supported a gold watch chain. He wore a derby hat to school and carried a fife, lining the children up on the porch each morning and marching them to music to their seats. He had a set of rulers and a pointer hewn of walnut and "when he whacked you, you knew it, though he only aimed at me once, and he missed!" There was a wood stove in the corner with tin around it. The wood pile was under the porch outside and Mr. Chase built and tended the fire. In the yard there were two outhouses — separate ones for girls and boys. The children brought corked bottles of coffee to school which they hung on strings tacked behind the stove. When the corks began to pop, around 10:30 or 11:00 o'clock, it signaled time for recess and games of baseball, fox and geese, cricket or hide and seek.

The records available make the exact dates uncertain, but in 1916 a teacher arrived at the school who was to influence the lives of children and their families for nearly 50 years.

Geraldine McCoy finished Plattsburg State Teachers' College in New York State, and took a job in this rural community's one-room school

where enrollment fluctuated between 8 and 30 students. When she arrived from her home in Glens Falls, N.Y. she rented a room from Miss Clarrisa (Clara) Hobby, the school's sole trustee, on Mianus River Road in what is now a North Castle Historical Landmark house. There were then eight grades plus kindergarten and though the curriculum included the traditional subjects at regular grade levels, the children had the benefits of an ungraded program. It was not unusual for them to listen to classwork of others and because of that to move ahead in their own subjects.

When Miss McCoy married the rural delivery postman and became Mrs. Lawrence Lanfair, she and her husband stayed with Miss Hobby till their own home was completed on East Middle Patent Road at the edge of the Town of Bedford. Mr. Lanfair drove his wife the three miles to school but she would walk home after school if he was still working. The children walked from a two mile radius.

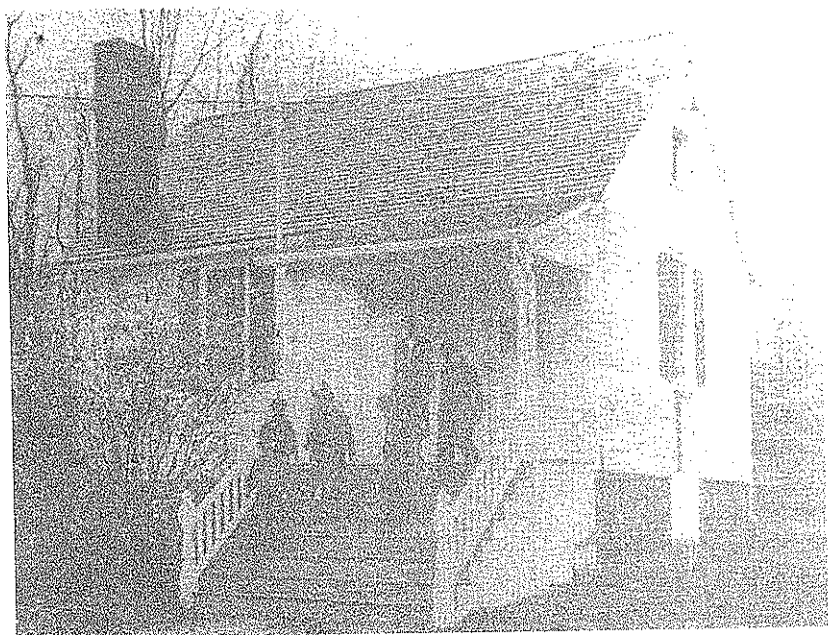
Through the years, the wood stove was changed to coal (a coal furnace was installed in the cellar), and according to former trustee Mrs. William Hubbell, after Mr. Lanfair died in 1948, the Parents Association approved the conversion to an oil burner which heated the building through a register in the floor. A small side area, six by eight, served as a library during the period when there were outhouses. Later a corner of the library was converted into a toilet until separate toilets for boys and girls were built in the basement.

During her years at the school, Mrs. Lanfair taught three generations of the Sullivan family, and at one point had seven of the thirteen Maraschke children in school at the same time. She also taught Mr. Miller's brother-in-law, Raymond Heath, as well as his two daughters, Margaret and Barbara. Through the years much of the enrollment came from the families of Finch, Miller, Ingersol, Cole, Godino, Bugli, Todd, Faithful, Hubbell, Gleason, Parke, Longcope, Ecclesine, Mead and Hewitt.

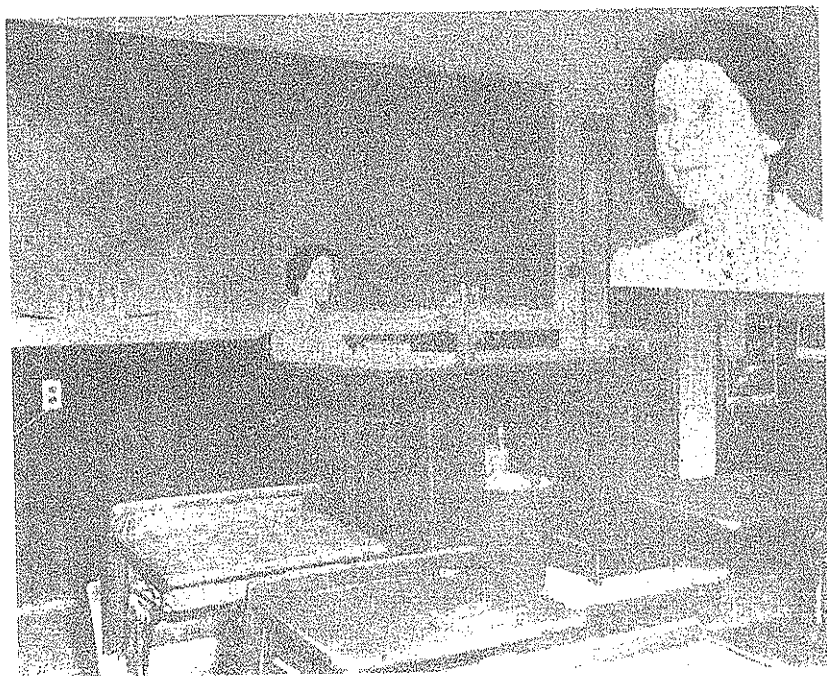
Schooltime memories of many of her students show her imagination and ingenuity in handling daily life in her isolated community. The school was her castle and she reigned with absolute control, "discouraging parental interference" according to Mrs. Ralph Bugli, another sole trustee. Everyone agrees discipline was never a problem. She gave gold stars and later silver dollars for perfect attendance each semester, and was only absent herself when she caught the measles from one of her pupils.

Everyone remembers the Christmas festivities: a beautifully-decorated tree in the back of the room, cards and gifts for everyone, traveling by truck (one year by horse and buggy) to sing Christmas carols at the homes in the neighborhood, after which all went back to the school or the Lanfair house for coca and sandwiches.

Twice a week her husband taught the older boys woodworking at his



Mrs. Lanfair watches pupils leaving East Middle Patent School 1948.



Geraldine McCoy Lanfair, 1955.

home after school. They learned to make such things as chairs and shelves. He provided the materials and there was never a charge. The parent of one student came to give piano lessons to the group, playing on an upright piano at the side of the room. On other occasions, Mrs. Lanfair played and taught music.

In the spring there were nature walks to look at birds and discover hidden wildflowers, with a star for the one who found the first of each variety. In 1940, Mrs. Lanfair received a certificate for "satisfactory completion" of courses offered at the New Hampshire Nature Camp at Lost River Reservation, North Woodstock, N.H. in Geology, Biology, Ornithology, Animal Biology and Teaching Methods.

During World Wars I and II she taught her pupils — boys as well as girls — to knit squares and then sew them together into blankets for soldiers. In World War II the children collected milkweed pods and removed the seeds from the silk which was then used to make parachutes. They grew Victory gardens, rolled bandages and sang patriotic songs. Mrs. Lanfair instilled patriotism, loyalty to the flag and made them feel proud to make sacrifices to aid soldiers overseas. "Jessamin, what are you doing for your country today?" she would ask.

In 1957 North Castle School District No. 1 was annexed to the Bedford Central School District. The building was found to be in good condition, well maintained by the custodian. The 1957-58 budget was \$9,238. When the addition to the Bedford Elementary School was completed, Mrs. Lanfair submitted her resignation, but was persuaded to stay one more year, until Spring, 1961. She was honored at a retirement reception at her schoolhouse on June 25, 1961. The file contains a congratulatory letter from Dwight D. Eisenhower and a proclamation from the then North Castle Supervisor James Caruso, declaring that date "GERALDINE LANFAIR APPRECIATION DAY."

A proposal to close the school was voted down, 14 to 12, and a teacher was found for the 1961-62 school year. The upper elementary students had transferred to the Bedford Elementary School but the lower grades remained. No teacher could be found in 1962 so the school was closed without a vote.

On Oct. 17, 1963 Mrs. Lanfair died, and was buried in St. Matthew's Episcopal Church cemetery beside her husband.

Much more can be told. People are eager to reminisce: a child's fears of the first day of school; sitting on the teacher's lap; George Washington's picture on the wall; the trick of the nines; the teacher's desk on a platform that seemed so high; desk and seat in front as one unit; an inkwell never used; no hot water; a cold, scary basement; a red glass globe fire extinguisher; hearing the only no-hitter world series game on the school radio; blackboards changed to green chalkboards, which were supposedly better for the eyes of small children.

The photographs are faded and the newspaper clippings brown and



crumbling, but, hopefully, someday it will all be recorded and preserved, as we hope will be the future of this memorable little building at the corner of East Middle Patent and Mianus River roads.

**FOOTNOTES:**

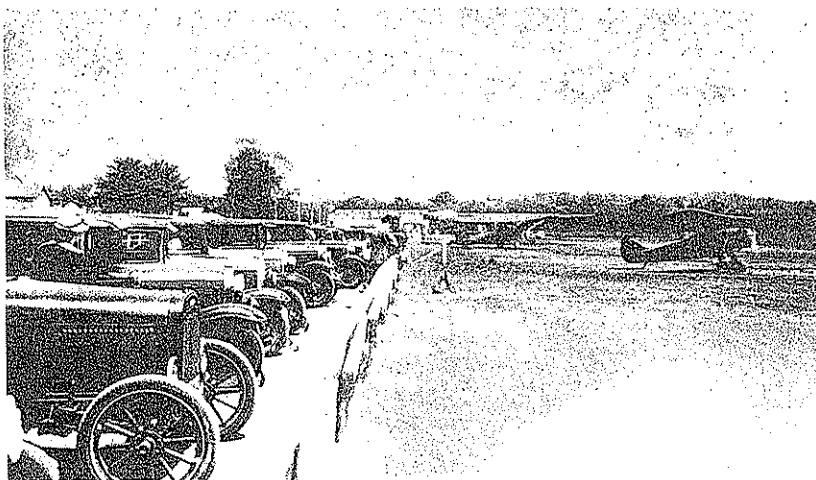
1. See Beer's Atlas of 1867.
2. Libre 1594 page 23 of deeds.
3. Victor Finch died in 1982 and is buried in Middle Patent Cemetery.

Hope (Mrs. Benjamin) Levene lives one field south of the East Middle Patent School. Her three children attended the school. Her father, Walter Weil, an esteemed resident of North Castle, was chairman of the North Castle Planning Board and also the Westchester County Planning Commission. He gave the opening address at Mrs. Lanfair's 40th Anniversary celebration.

We appreciate the generosity of the Bedford Free Library in lending us their file on Mrs. Lanfair and the East Middle Patent School.



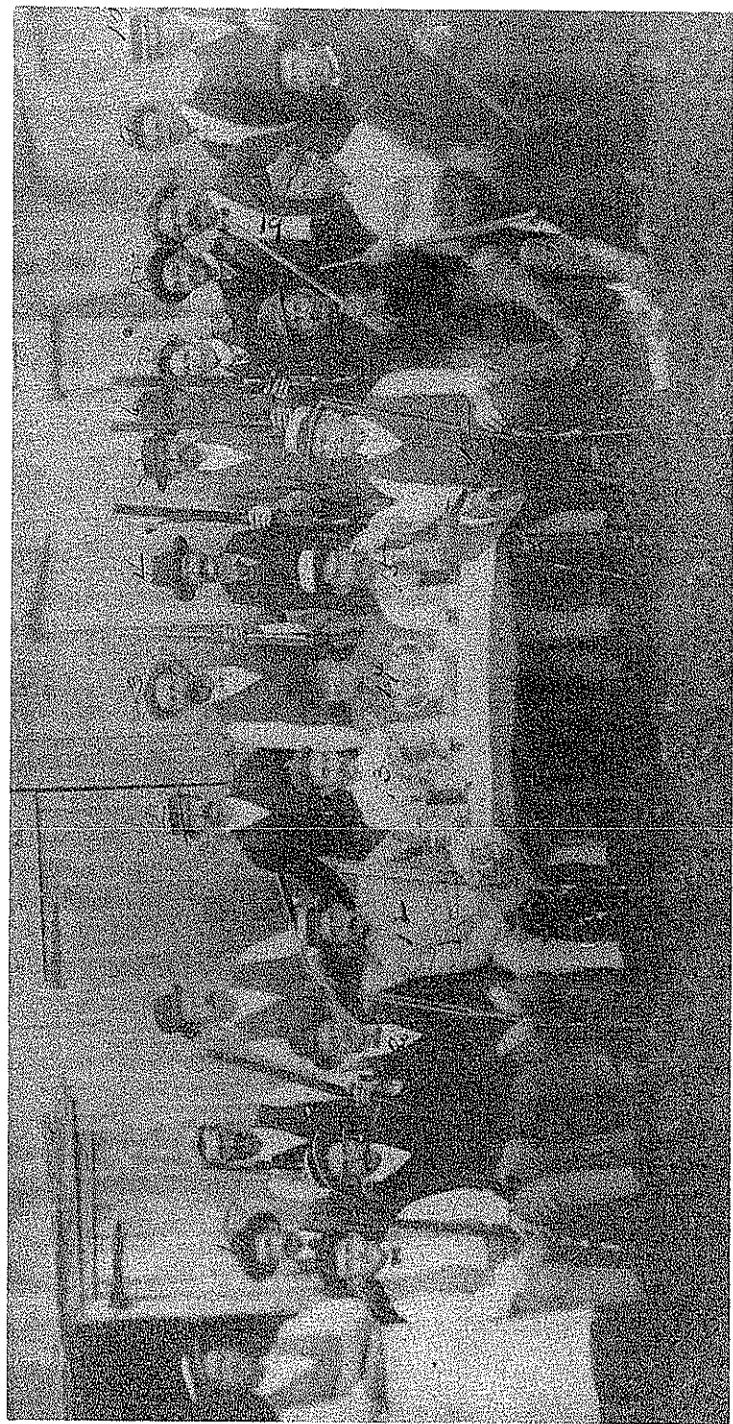
## A SCENE FROM THE PAST



In the 1930's the Westchester (Armonk) Airport attracted thousands of spectators to its air shows. See North Castle History, Vol. 6, 1979, "Armonk's Adventure in Aviation," for the story of the airport.

In researching for the picture caption accompanying last year's article "Miss Webster's School," it could not be determined the last name of the boy third from left, bottom row: Tony?

One of our readers identified the boy as Tony Krouch, who, it is said, lived in the old Brundage house opposite Smith's Tavern. We are told that he died a few years after the picture was taken.



THE ARMONK GUN CLUB, taken around 1900 just after the club was organized. They met periodically, generally on weekends at Jacob Louis Long's barn on the "Armonk Flat" approximately where the southerly property line of the Crittenden school is today. Refreshments, mostly liquid, were always served by a waiter (unknown, far left of picture). Note the liquid refreshments and trophy on the center of the table. How long the club lasted is not known. Seated left to right front row: Floy D. Coles, Whitmond Sniffen, Melvin Horton, Robert H. Quinby, William F. MacDonald, Mr. Walton, Joseph S. Carpenter, James S. Young, Ezekiel Flewellen, George Wood, Charles Barnard. Back row left to right: Edwin F. Acker, George Mulner, Lewis Platt, Thomas Taylor, John Read, Gerald Howett, Gilbert T. (Kip) Flewellen, Danny See (between guns), William Howett, William H. Acker, Fred Boemer. Harry T. Wayne and Colonel Samuel Roe pictured from the collection of Bishop St. Francis. Digitized by Google

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