

# WALPACK

## historical society

*"Preserving a Fine  
Tradition of Caring"*

www.walpackhistory.org

Newsletter of the  
Walpack Historical Society

Published Quarterly

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### A BIG DAY FOR A LITTLE OAK

by Erik L. Burro

It was a beautiful day in mid-October, with bright sun. Just over the mountain a dappled array of clouds meant the possibility of a light shower. Cars and pickup trucks were arriving on a narrow paved lane that dropped down from the main road and circled the densely wooded mountain. The lane, once adjacent to a no longer extant, pre-Revolution Dutch Reformed church, continued beyond the parked vehicles past a clearing on the right with a gentle rise next to the Lower Walpack Cemetery.

To the left of the lane was an undulating field, thick with brush, stunted cedars and tall grasses. The lane's end was several hundred yards away, leading to a former farmhouse and out-buildings, once associated with the much earlier Rosenkrans Ferry. Beyond, one can see through thick sugar maples that seem to defy gravity, standing tall upon a steep, fifty-foot embankment. Through their limbs are glimpses of the glistening surface of the Delaware as it moves downriver past an obscured ferry landing. This area was known for thousands of years, even before discovery of the New World, by Lenape natives as *Wahl-peck*; the place where the river eddies or turns back upon itself with whirlpools created by unseen obstacles in the riverbed. Unrealized by the natives, the European colonists who followed, or even those currently living in the vicinity, the destiny of this remote place had been mysteriously preordained by the very meaning of its original name, Walpack. When you

watch a whirlpool, it flows backwards in order to move forward.

All who arrived for the tree planting had been invited by the Walpack Historical Society. They included township residents, local, county and state officials, as well as supporters of the society's historical preservation programs. At the top of the freshly-mown rise was an American flag flapping in the breeze. Had there been a flagpole at this spot when the cemetery had been donated by early settlers, Nicholas Schoonhoven and Thomas Brink, it would have been white with the red cross of St. George, an English flag. The earliest gravestones date back three centuries, reflecting the influence of early Dutch and French Huguenots from Esopus who first explored the region. Eagles soaring overhead could witness about 40 people gathering, nearly three times the number of permanent residents of the township of 24 square miles. These extreme statistics make Walpack the biggest of the smallest towns of New Jersey.

While Walpack has always been sparsely populated, its population both permanent and temporary, was once much higher. It was a strategic location for defense during the French and Indian War, a safe haven against British troops during the American Revolution, a place of worship and rural link to early ferries that crossed over to Pennsylvania. It was also heavily exploited during the advent of the industrial revolution,



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The Walpack Historical Society

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sending much of its original forest to nearby mills and towns downriver in massive waves of indiscriminate logging. After its excessive clear-cutting, the region gradually recovered, returning to its verdant wilderness. The region saw the gradual emergence of remote farms. Farmers were able to adapt to the rugged terrain; raised dairy cattle; grew grain and cultivating fruit orchards. Limited financial success was improved as better roads made getting to market easier.

A century ago, further improvements in transportation popularized the region for getaway resorts and sportsmen's activities for wealthy city folks from metropolitan New York only 70 miles away. The upswing in popularity brought new employment opportunities for those who lived in or near Walpack; but it could not be sustained. Global wars and economic depression brought further setbacks to the rural township.

A half century later, a lingering tragic memory for many, the Tocks Island Dam project was begun by the US Army Corps of Engineers to offset serious flooding in the Delaware Valley. It mandated a massive buyout of property owners that nearly ended the existence of Walpack Township. It

also brought further reversal back to nature. Most of the homes, barns, shops and post office were abandoned with no legal means of return, despite the project eventually being withdrawn by Congress. The few families that never sold out, including the still operating Walpack Inn, remain the last remnants of a still surviving Walpack Township.

As sad as this back story may be, the township and its many square miles of second growth forest have been incorporated into the two-state, Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. It has become a natural buffer-zone against the perils of over-development and a key factor in protection and improvement of the Delaware River, a water supply relied upon by millions. Today it is managed by the National Park Service.

With such a small population, it is a wonder it has continued as a viable township. Even more surprising, it has an active historical society. Old timers visiting, after years of absence, are astonished to discover their uninhabited Walpack Center and outlier structures are being protected from vandals by members of the Walpack Historical Society and Historic Property Stewards. Society members proudly volunteer to showcase





## 2022 CALENDAR

April 3	Spring Hike: TBD
April 24	Spring Dinner at The Walpack Inn
May 15	A presentation by Jennifer Palmer
June 4	National Trail Day
June 26	Walpack at the Movies
July 17	Lower Walpack Cemetery by Sharon Spangenberg
Aug. 21	The Anniversary of 1955 Flood by Don Stieh
Sept. 18	Fire Tower hike by Dan Tassey & Mike Orlowski
Oct. 9	Van Campen Day
Nov. 6	Fall Hike - Military Road East
Dec. 3	Walpack Christmas - Church and Museum
Dec. 4	Holiday Dinner - Walpack Inn
Dec. 10 & 11	Walpack Christmas - Church and Museum

*All events are subject to change based on current CDC & NPS Covid guidelines*

*\*Visit [WalpackHistory.org](http://WalpackHistory.org) and [Facebook.com/WalpackHistory](https://www.facebook.com/WalpackHistory) for calendar updates, changes and details.*

## WHS NEWSLETTER SPONSORSHIPS

The production of our newsletter is a time-consuming and costly ongoing project for the WHS. As our membership grows so do our expenses for printing and mailing the newsletter. To help, please consider becoming a sponsor. Simply make a donation and note that it is for "Newsletter sponsor."

*The Walpack Historical Society would like to particularly thank the Wards of Montclair, NJ for their most generous support of our Newsletter.*



## 2022 MEMBERSHIP DUES ARE NOW DUE

Did you know there are two ways to pay your membership dues?

1. If you wish to pay your dues through the mail, please fill out the Membership Form on page 7 and send it together with your payment to the address on the form.
2. Visit [www.walpackhistory.org](http://www.walpackhistory.org), click on the Membership tab to pay your 2021 membership dues online using PayPal.

*All memberships must be made current in order to remain on our mailing list. Thank you!*

## THANK YOU!

*To everyone who becomes a Member, makes a donation, sponsors the newsletter, attends a dinner, and/or buys a book, we sincerely appreciate your support.*

### New Members

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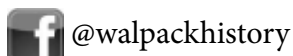


A docent is a person who acts as a guide, typically on a voluntary basis. We are always looking for new people to help us at our events and meetings throughout the year.

Please call 973-948-4903 to speak with Jen Wycalek to learn more about how you can help play a part in history.



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their restored, historic site, the Van Campen Inn, a registered landmark from America's colonial past, during history-related events throughout the year. Also considered miraculous by visitors whose family members once lived in Walpack, have been the volunteer restorations of several cemeteries, previously overgrown and forgotten. On that mid-October day the newly restored Lower Walpack Cemetery, became the gathering place for the eager assembly of men, women and children.



no one expected the tree would mysteriously fall the following June, on a clear, windless day. After that had occurred, the Salem Friends welcomed the public to a memorial program at their meetinghouse where attendees were encouraged to contribute personal memories, events and reminiscences about the town's favorite tree. In the period before the fallen oak was removed, spectators were offered small branches and leaves, as keepsakes, by a volunteer stationed by the burial ground gate. They were also invited to sign a guest book which included

The seedling everyone came to see planted was no ordinary seedling. It was a two-year-old scion from New Jersey's famous Salem Oak, which until a year ago, had witnessed more than five centuries of Delaware Valley history. Everyone is optimistic. There is talk that the Salem seedling would become a shade tree for future volunteers and visitors to the cemetery. As far as they are concerned, once planted, it will already be considered a landmark. Several years before, in Salem County, NJ State Forester, Joe Bennett, after inspecting the Salem oak at the Friends Burial Ground, was permitted by the Salem Quaker Meeting to collect over a thousand acorns. At the time,

many out-of-state visitors. Meanwhile, the acorns Joe Bennett had collected were permitted to germinate at the NJ Dept. of Forestry's greenhouse in Jackson, NJ, and become healthy, replantable seedlings. Each city, township and municipality in the State had been offered a Salem oak seedling. As of the tree-planting day in Walpack, only forty had been accepted, and not all of those planted. The global pandemic had disrupted the original plan for seedling distribution.

In previous years, the Salem Oak's offspring had been shared with other churchyards in Salem, including one that commemorated construction of a new church building, by planting a Salem oak in an unoccupied







family plot that had been donated for that purpose. Those trees continue to flourish. In Virginia, when the Colonial Highway was built linking restored Colonial Williamsburg with Jamestown, Salem oaks were contributed, but a record of their exact locations along the parkway are unknown. South of Salem, in the early years of the Republic, there was a large region of primal white oaks. Over a period of 30

years, they had been gradually harvested by the Reeves Brothers' shipyard. Once the oaks were gone, so too was the shipbuilder.

Walpack and Salem have much in common. Both were the earliest English-speaking towns in their respective counties. Although separated by a distance of nearly 150 miles, each is next to the Delaware River. (Because the Tocks Island Dam project did not take place, the Delaware remains the longest free-flowing river in the Eastern United States and has the most extensive National Wild and Scenic River protection of any watershed in the country.) Both towns lie within the region known to native Americans as Lenapehoking, the land of the Lenape people. Each experienced loss of their virgin forests, yet both still have noteworthy NJ Heritage Trees. Both were begun within the designated West Jersey partition that separated colonial New Jersey's East and West Proprietorships, during the reign of England's Charles II.

When all guests had arrived, event organizer, Dan Tassey, raised his hand at the highest point of the clearing, and introduced Walpack Historical Society President, Don Stieh, who made brief welcoming remarks as the standing attendees formalized their circle. Walpack Township Deputy Mayor, Jen Wycalek, offered a prayer and read a brief statement of thanks to the society and expressed the gratitude of the other township committee members unable to participate. Walpack researcher, Sharon

Spangenberg, presented a brief summary of the historic cemetery. Bill Truran, widely known Sussex County historian, spoke briefly about the admired resiliency of Walpack and the significance of what was soon to take place.

At this point, Dan Tassey introduced the first guest speaker, Vincent Mann, a chief of the Turtle Clan of the Ramapough Lenape Nation, who lived much of his life in the neighboring Ramapo region of North Jersey. He stood proudly dressed in simple native garb holding a wide, shallow hand drum with painted turtle. He addressed the circle in a soft-spoken manner. He stood at the lowest part of the clearing. The sun was at his back as he expressed his gratitude for being invited to the ceremony. He conveyed his thoughts in a spirit of brotherhood and spoke of respect for his ancestors' land. His primary message was that united action was needed to assure a safe and bountiful world that would benefit all mankind. In the course of these remarks, he paused to make an appeal to the Great Spirit, that all people of the world would come to realize the harm being inflicted upon the environment. Events such as the seedling planting are recognition of the blessings of our natural world. Though the chief's face was in deep shadow, his soft-spoken appeal seemed amplified by its importance.

He was then directed to the head of the circle, at the top of the rise, where he drummed and chanted in his native language, words of thanksgiving, recognition of nature's bounty and solicitations for future guidance and help. At the conclusion of his syncopated supplication, an older man dressed in black, buckled shoes and matching wide brim hat stepped forward, within the circle. He walked up to the chief and introduced himself as John Fenwick, (portrayed by the author) the







of the seedling.

Fenwick commented that while Salem and Walpack burial grounds were revered sites of colonial ancestors, they should also be reminders of the countless generations of native people that preceded those marked by nearby gravestones. He acknowledged that the Salem oak had been at the final resting place of fourteen generations of Quakers, but, also witness to earlier natives and colonists that had benefitted from life along the Delaware River. He

Quaker proprietor of Salem, New Jersey, which he began in 1675, just north of where the Delaware River meets the bay. He said he would continue a time-honored tradition, as a sign of friendship, and provide a gift for the chief, before making further remarks. From a tan cloth sack, he revealed a gold edged picture frame in which was a pen and ink drawing of the famous Salem Oak. He explained it had been drawn by an elderly Salem artist whose Swedish ancestors had been among the first to settle in the vicinity of the Salem oak, two generations before the town of Salem had begun. (Today's descendants of those early Swedish and Finnish colonists continue to share and celebrate their combined heritage, with their local Lenape clan.) The image of the revered oak emphasized the significance

asked, "Is it not proper for us to consider our special time together, as also Ancestors Day?"

Salem's proprietor revealed why he had chosen the name of Salem for his fledgling community. He explained, before becoming a Quaker, he had served as an officer in the Parliamentary cavalry, during the English Civil War. Even after the Restoration, conflicts with Holland continued. "Once the Dutch had finally relinquished their claims in North America, I purchased a proprietary interest in the new colony of New Jerseys and convinced a group of Quaker families to emigrate with me. Here we would be able to resume our lives without the conflicts

and religious persecution we had experienced in England. What better name to describe our hopes and expectations than the biblically derived name for peace, SALEM.

With that, Fenwick bent down, and removed a handful of postcards which had two color images: the old Salem Oak and the seal of the West Jersey Proprietorship, which were passed out to everyone. He stated he wanted all to have a likeness of the parent tree of the seedling and was





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fairly certain that many in Sussex County may never have seen it. Turning to the chief, he commented so all could hear, "I am hopeful your solemn words will inspire this generation to be mindful of man's impact upon the environment. Long before the causes of pollution became evident, a wise man from my own generation, Quaker William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania, wrote these words: 'How joyful if we study Nature more in natural Things—acting according to Nature, whose Rules are few, plain and most reasonable.' His message, like yours," turning to the chief, "has never been so important."



Fenwick then directed everyone to look upon the seal of the West Jersey Proprietorship. In addition to the calipers of a land surveyor, he pointed to the scales clearly shown centered over the image of a small tree. "While this was originally intended to represent equitable

value for land purchases in the 17th century, it could just as easily be used in these times to represent maintaining an appropriate balance between nature and the needs of mankind." Before concluding his remarks, Fenwick removed two handfuls of small white envelopes from a leather pouch and distributed them. Each had a small stamp medallion showing an early colonist, tilling a homestead garden. Fenwick's instructive message, "Please open your envelopes. Inside you will find two acorns from a white oak from Penn's woods. It is my hope that you will plant one, somewhere near your home with room to grow. The other? Keep it in your pocket, leave it on the kitchen counter or by your desk, not just as a souvenir of today, but as a reminder to participate with organizations seeking to reduce climate change that threatens future generations."

Then Fenwick beckoned the chief to proceed, side by side, to the place within



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the circle where the Salem seedling was to be planted. The old Quaker was given a small spade to remove the soil from the designated spot. When done, together they removed the seedling from its pot and placed it into the earth. Fenwick pensively watched as Chief Mann knelt next to the planted tree, gently patting the earth around it. He spoke respectfully to the tree, then raised his head skyward, expressing hope it would flourish and be appreciated by those that follow.

They were joined by eight-year-old Madison Paige, the youngest volunteer who was proudly wearing a bright Junior Ranger badge, given her by the Park Service. With both hands she held a specially decorated watering can and carefully emptied its contents around the newly planted tree. Madison smiled, agreeing she would continue to watch over what is now being called *The Salem Oak of*



*Walpack.* The ceremony had come to an end. Rounds of applause followed, and there was much socializing.

*Participants left to right: Don Stieh, Bill Truran, Sharon Spangenberg, John Fenwick (portrayed by Erik L. Burro), Chief Vincent Mann, Madison Paige, and Dan Tassey. Missing from photo, Jen Wycalek.*

### MISSION STATEMENT

The Society actively stimulates an awareness and interest in the Walpack area through lectures, tours, publications and special events, such as Van Campen Day, hikes and exhibits at county-wide events.

It promotes collection, preservation and dissemination of Walpack area history and acts as a repository for artifacts of the Walpack area, and also maintains a small museum and book store and provides tours of Walpack Center.