



# Cragsmoor Historical Journal



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## EARLY CRAGSMOOR: THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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### Introduction

In 2013, the Cragsmoor Conservancy asked us to conduct a documentary and archaeological investigation of the Peter P. Brown House Site, formerly the home of the farmer Peter P. Brown (1801-1884), who in his old age became a favorite model of the well-known Cragsmoor artist, Edward Lamson Henry (1841-1919). In the course of our research, we came to realize that the early history of Cragsmoor is largely unknown. Having completed our work for the Conservancy and motivated by curiosity, we began to search for historic documents that might tell us more about the community's beginnings and initial period of settlement. This article is the first of a three-part series presenting the results of this research.

*Note to readers: As you read this article, you will see such phrases as "the site of present-day Cragsmoor" or "the plateau upon which Cragsmoor now sits." Additionally, you will notice that many of the historic documents and written accounts cited as sources reference the Town of Rochester rather than the Town of Wawarsing. The historic basis for this is: a) the name "Cragsmoor" did not exist until 1893; and b) the Town of Wawarsing did not exist until 1806, when it was carved out of the Town of Rochester.*

Name of Heads of Families - Rochester	white males		white females	
	10 years & under	10 years & under	10 years & under	10 years & under
Daniel Lilly	2	1	2	2
John Evans	1	1	1	1
John Coleman	1	1	1	1
John Italy	1	1	1	1
Josiah Pennington	1	1	1	1
William Lewis	1	1	1	2
John Lewis son	1	1	1	1

A portion of the 1800 United States Census listing heads of households living within the present-day site of Cragsmoor. These names also appear in the Land Partition Records compiled for the same area circa 1799.

Source: 1800 United States Census.

### Background

Throughout much of the eighteenth century, as the surrounding Rondout and Wallkill Valleys gradually filled with farms, roads and houses, the Shawangunk Mountain plateau that would become the site of Cragsmoor remained unsettled. As early as 1705 there were settlements at Wawarsing, Napanoch, and Bruynswick. As these communities grew, they clustered around local institutions that typically included a Dutch Reformed Church, a grist mill, and a tavern. Deeds, church records and maps are the earliest documents testifying to the existence of such places and their inhabitants. No such documents exist, however, for eighteenth-century Cragsmoor. The first recorded deed for property within present-day Cragsmoor is dated 1800. The earliest known map of the Cragsmoor area also bears the date 1800. It shows a series of structures and roadways suggesting scattered farmsteads – not a community such as those that existed in the two surrounding valleys. How then do we account for this apparent lag in settlement?

One reason was that there was little motivation for people to move to the mountaintop until the available land in the Rondout and Wallkill valleys had been claimed. The plateau that would become Cragsmoor was located at one of the highest elevations along the Shawangunk Ridge – a mountain largely characterized by thin rocky soil, rugged terrain and steeply angled slopes. Paths across the mountain existed, but with the exception of fur trappers and hunters, few lingered. Less forbidding, more fertile and easily accessible land was available in the valleys.

Historical events may also have contributed to the delay in settlement. Violence associated with the Revolutionary War (1775-1783) discouraged settlement in exposed and isolated areas such as the site of present-day Cragsmoor. The Rondout Valley, positioned along the western fringe of European settlement, was especially vulnerable to attacks by Tories and their Native American allies. Local settlements were attacked, as were homes and individuals on the mountaintop and its slopes. Local inhabitants expressed their fear in a series of petitions sent to Governor Clinton pleading for troops to protect them. Others fled the region entirely.

The primary reason for the delay, however, was that until 1800, the land upon which Cragsmoor now sits was not available for purchase by individual settlers.

Such withdrawal of land from the market was the result of provincial land policy, the basis of which was the parceling out of large swaths of the countryside – much of it already occupied by Native Americans – by the British royal government and their colonial representatives. The Town of Wawarsing (including Cragsmoor and much of the Shawangunk Ridge directly overlooking Ellenville) originally lay within the southeastern portion of one of these huge land grants, known as the Rochester Patent, conferred by Queen Anne in 1703.

In 1728, the trustees appointed to administer the Rochester Patent broke off a 12,677 acre portion of the Shawangunk Ridge that included the site of present-day Cragsmoor and sold it to Frederick Schoonmaker and Cornelius Hornbeck. Deeds identify Hornbeck as a blacksmith residing in the Town of Rochester. Schoonmaker was a son of Captain Joachim Schoonmaker, one of the original trustees of the Rochester Patent. Frederick is described in Sylvester's *History of Ulster County* as someone who "took an active part in the administration of the most important trusts of the Township."

Although there were several habitable areas within the tract, parceling out the land and selling it to settlers does not seem to have been among the new owners' priorities. In fact, the documents indicate that their objective was the exploitation of the mountain's mineral resources. Schoonmaker and Hornbeck were apparently aware of the presence of a lead mine within the bounds of their purchase, located at the mountain's western base, near present-day Ellenville. Within a month of having purchased the tract, Schoonmaker and Hornbeck secured rights to the mine from its Native American (most likely Esopus) proprietors. Subsequent deeds and other documents indicate that by 1730 – in order to defray the costs of purchasing the land and to obtain capital for their mining venture – Schoonmaker and Hornbeck entered into a partnership with a group of investors.

Shares in the mine and the land surrounding it were divided among the original two co-owners and their new partners. In addition to Anthony Rutgers, a wealthy New York City merchant who apparently acted as the head of the mining venture, the partnership also included Cadwallader Colden (1688-1776), at the time the province's surveyor-general. Eventually, this brilliant scientist-statesman would gain great



Cadwallader Colden (1688-1776). Surveyor general and governor of colonial New York. During the eighteenth century, he was among the co-owners of a tract of land that included the present-day site of Cragsmoor, Mt. Meenahga, and the Sam's Point Preserve. Source: [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Author:Cadwallader\\_Colden](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Author:Cadwallader_Colden).

political power as the governor of colonial New York. He would also be remembered as "the most disliked public official in the Province." It is doubtful that the partners ever realized great profit from their mine. Although several shafts were excavated and an unknown quantity of ore removed, the mine had been abandoned by the time of the Revolutionary War.

Finally, in the last decade of eighteenth century, the heirs of the tract's original owners released their land for sale. In accordance with the state legislature's "1785 Act for the Partition of Lands," the Cragsmoor plateau and its environs were surveyed and partitioned into saleable lots. Three commissioners appointed by the Town of Rochester oversaw the process. Of the three large allotments created, the 7,671 acre "First Allotment" contained the Cragsmoor plateau, the present-day site of the Mt. Meenahga community, and other sections of the mountaintop including Sam's Point and Lake Maratanza. The First Allotment, like the other two allotments, was further subdivided into nine separate lots, reflecting the shares owned by the original partners.

### The First Survey and Map of the Cragsmoor Plateau: What These Documents Tell Us

Much of what we have learned about the earliest decades of the community that would one day become Cragsmoor comes from the documents created during

### THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*Looking back — 2013 was a very good year for the CHS.*

First and foremost, we want to thank all of you who responded so generously to the Matching Gift Fund. We not only met the goal of \$6,000, which was matched by an anonymous donor who inspired others, but we exceeded that amount! A hearty thank you to all who helped. You will certainly see your money at work as we complete the bathroom and continue to restore the inside of the building this summer.

We also completed several of the scheduled projects, such as the shed to house equipment for maintenance of the building and property, the septic system for the library, and our septic system, which is waiting for the completion of the bathroom.

In celebration of 100 years since the building of Yama Farms, we collaborated with the Ellenville Public Library and Museum in presenting a week of lectures, displays, walking tours, articles and personal story-sharing with family and friends who were directly connected to people who were involved with the resort. It was a privilege to be a part of this celebration, for which EPL&M received a Greater Hudson Heritage Network Award for Excellence in Collaborative Planning.

With the printing of this spring *Journal*, please be reminded that the payment of membership dues (\$20) is necessary to receive the summer and fall issues. We look forward to seeing you at the annual meeting on June 21 at 10 AM.

Again, we want to thank you all for your encouraging support and generous financial donations.

Sally Matz

the partitioning of these mountaintop lands. Filed April 8, 1800, they are presently housed along with other "Land Partition Records" at the Ulster County Clerk's Archives Division in Kingston. Included among them is a detailed hand-drawn pen and ink map showing the locations and numbers of the various allotments and lots, landmarks such as Sam's Point, roadways and footpaths, as well as houses. The bulk of these documents, however, consist of a set of legal papers chronicling the actual partition proceedings. The most useful for our purposes are the pages apparently based upon the 1799 work of the surveyor Jonas Smith, providing descriptions of lot dimensions, landmarks used in the surveying of the lots, and, in many cases, the names of the inhabitants occupying specific lots. These settlers, however, did not own the land they occupied because the Schoonmaker/Hornbeck tract was still the joint property of the heirs of the original early eighteenth-century proprietors. Thus we assume that the settlers were here as tenants or possibly as "squatters" and therefore without permission from the joint owners. Under whatever circumstances these people came to reside upon the Cragsmoor plateau, these partition records are the best evidence we have yet come across indicating that Euro-American settlers lived here during the late eighteenth century.

#### The Late Eighteenth-Century Settlers

The partition records give us the names of the 1799 occupants of eight of the nine lots as follows (Lot I being unoccupied): Sakariah Vandermark - Lot II; William Goldsmith - Lot III (note that Lots II and III are located within present-day Mt. Meenahga); Daniel Lilly - Lot IV; Jeremiah Brown - Lot V; William Berigan - Lot VI; William Lewis - Lot VII; Josiah Terwilliger - Lot VIII; and both John Lewis, Jr. and W. Evans on Lot IX (note that the 1800 map shows two houses on Lot IX). In addition, our analysis of the boundary descriptions of the various lots indicates that John Coleman was the occupant of the southernmost of the two houses shown on the "Expense Lot" (land set aside to defray the costs of partition). It is likely that John Staly, listed in the 1800 census after Coleman, occupied the northernmost house. The copy of the 1800 map included here will enable the reader to see where on the mountain each of these households was located. Having found the names of Cragsmoor's eighteenth-century male inhabitants, we next turned to the 1800 United States Census to see what more we could learn about these men and their families. The



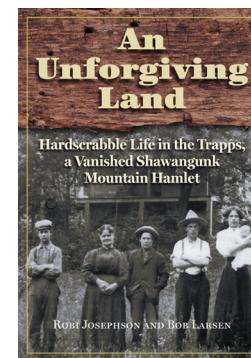
The area that would become Cragsmoor, Mt. Meenahga, and the Sam's Point Preserve was first partitioned into saleable lots in 1800. This portion of an 1800 land partition map, based on surveys conducted in the 1790s, shows these lots (II - IX and "the First Expense Lot"), as well as the locations of settlers' homes. Sam's Point and Lake Maratanza ("Pond") are also depicted. Source: Bruyn, Cantine and Oliver 1800.

Courtesy of Ulster County Clerk's Office, Archives Division

census, in fact, listed seven of the above men (Lilly, Brown, Terwilliger, Coleman, Staly and both Lewis's Lewises) as household heads. The others apparently had left the mountain shortly after completion of the 1799 survey. Each of these seven households included between three and eight persons. Two of the men who lived here with their families, and presumably farmed the land, were younger than 27 (Brown and Lewis Jr.) three were older than 44 (Coleman, Terwilliger and Lewis), while Lilly and Staly were between 26 and 45. Although women's names are not recorded in the census, their ages and the ages of any children living with them tell us something about their lives. For example, of the seven households, four contained women between 16 and 45 who were caring for children under the age of 10. One of these women, probably the wife of Daniel Lily (lot IV), was caring for 4 four children under the age of 10 – two boys and two girls. Our analysis of Church records and other genealogical sources provides additional information about some of these settlers. For example, Josiah Terwilliger, like other Terwilligers living on the mountain later in the nineteenth century, was a descendent of Evert Dirksen, who arrived in New Netherland on in March 1662, from Vianen, Holland. Josiah was born in 1754 and married Margaret Griffen. They had six children, and analysis indicates that the two children listed in the 1800 census as still living with their parents were Abraham and Margaret – 15 year-old-twins.

These late eighteenth-century "pioneers" all left the mountain shortly after the 1800 land partition. Subsequent census records and land deeds identify the families and individuals that succeeded them on the various lots during the early nineteenth century. In some cases these were members of the same extended families – the Terwilligers and Goldsmiths and Evanses – represented by the 1799 occupants, while other families, including the Mentzes (ancestors of Cragsmoor's Mance and Peters families) and the Coddingtons, were new to the mountain. In our next article we will discuss these families and the other families and individuals who joined them on the Cragsmoor plateau during the early decades of the nineteenth century.

*Note: The source list for this article will be included with the second in this series in the next issue. It is also available upon request at wharris.cragsmoor@gmail.com.*



*An Unforgiving Land*  
Illustrated Talk and  
Book Signing  
May 31, 4 PM, CHS

Cragsmoor's early history has been in the limelight ever since last summer, when Cragsmoor Consultants Wendy Harris and Arnold Pickman began their archeological research at the site of the former Peter Brown house on the corner of Henry and Schuyler Roads. That project plunged them deeper into Cragsmoor's misty past than they might have expected. It has, in fact, led to an in-depth exploration of its beginnings, which they have compiled into two articles, the first of which we are proud to offer as the focus of this issue of the Journal.

Our hamlet, however, was not the only ridge-top community on the Shawangunks that struggled to sustain itself in this harsh environment. The Trapps settlement, in a hollow between Minnewaska and Mohonk, grew to a community of fifty families. *An Unforgiving Land: Hardscrabble Life in the Trapps, a Vanished Shawangunk Mountain Hamlet* is the story of the people, their way of life and their fight for survival for 150 years.

Meticulously researched, vividly narrated and accompanied by numerous period photographs, the book, by authors Bob Larsen and Robi Josephson, has captured the essence of life on the ridge, which in many ways was similar to that of our community in its earliest days. Larsen, Mohonk Preserve cultural historian and veteran ranger, became interested in the Trapps hamlet when he came to the area as a young man with a group of adventurous climbers. His research, interviews and documentation led to the listing of the hamlet as the only subsistence community in New York State on the National Register of Historic Places. Josephson brought her scholarly skills as a writer and historian to the project, and together they have created not only a volume of historical significance to the region, but one that is also a delight to read.

The CHS will host an illustrated talk and book signing by the authors on Saturday, May 31, at 4 PM. A percentage of the book sales will benefit the CHS. Refreshments will be served and donations gratefully accepted.

More information at [www.cragsmoor.info](http://www.cragsmoor.info),  
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