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EARLY CRAGSMOOR: THE MENTZ AND TERWILLIGER FAMILIES

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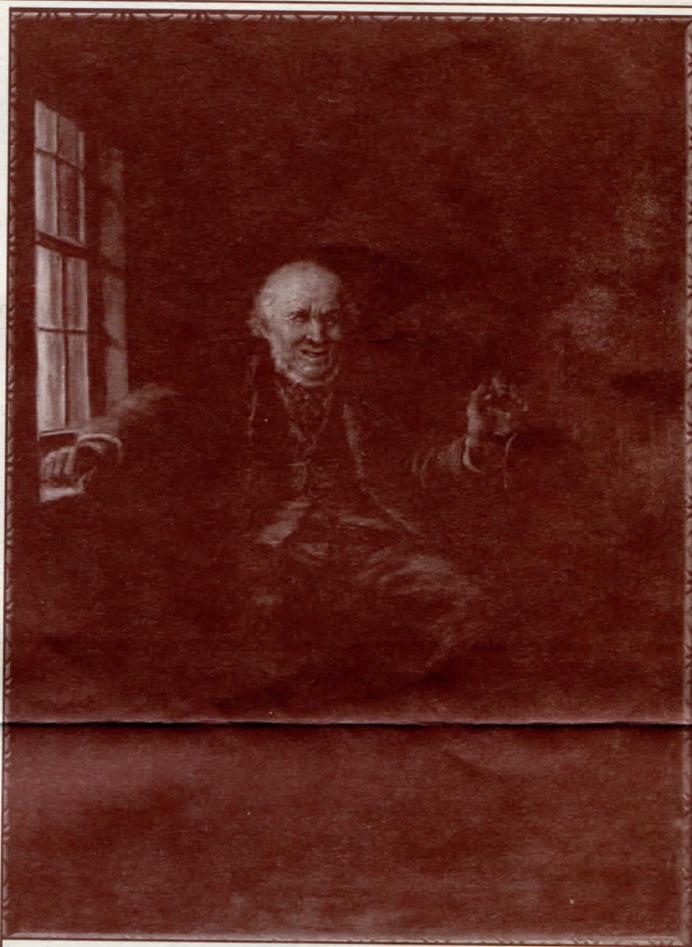
Introduction

This is the second of three articles examining aspects of Cragsmoor's early history that have never been fully explored. In our previous article we discussed the eighteenth-century origins of the Cragsmoor community. During much of that century, Cragsmoor, Mount Meenahga, Lake Maratanza and Sam's Point were part of a 12,677-acre tract of land that had been originally granted to Frederick Schoonmaker and Cornelius Hornbeck. Hoping to raise the necessary capital to develop a lead mine at the mountain's western base, the two had taken in a group of wealthy men and others as partners. Beginning in 1799, the land was surveyed and divided among the heirs of this group by a process known as "land partitioning." At the time of the partitioning, the Cragsmoor area was home to eleven families who did not own their land but occupied it as tenants or possibly as squatters. Most of them left the mountain by the time the partitioning had been completed, presumably because they did not have the money to purchase the land on which they lived and worked. New families would take up residence here, purchasing and further subdividing the newly created lots. In the article that follows, we will focus upon two of these early nineteenth-century families, the Mentzes and the Terwilligers.

The Mentz Family of Cragsmoor:

The Community's First Known Land Owners

The partitioning described in the introduction divided what is now Cragsmoor and the Mount Meenahga area into seven saleable lots. One of these was the so-called "First Expense Lot," created and sold at auction in order to defray some of the costs associated with the partitioning. The Ulster County deed filed for the Expense Lot's purchase indicates that John Mentz, a resident of the Town of Shawangunk, was the highest bidder, paying \$450 for the 782-acre parcel, which



*E.L. Henry's 1886 Painting of Martin Terwilliger (born 1795).
From the collection of the Village of Ellenville.
Photo by Joan Lesikin.*

extended from the South Gully to slightly north of the site of today's Cragsmoor Free Library (see 1800 land partition map). Mentz's deed, filed May 1, 1800, represents the earliest recorded deed for land within the Cragsmoor plateau.

In time, the Mentz family would anglicize their name to Mance. In addition to their role in the early history of Cragsmoor, the family is of interest to us because their direct descendents, members of the Peters family, still live in Cragsmoor. Using whatever primary documents were available, as well as some especially compelling secondary sources, we have attempted to reconstruct the story of John Mentz and his immediate family. We are fortunate to have been aided in our research by Fawn Tantillo, the Mance family genealogist.



Portion of 1800 land partition map showing lot boundaries and settlers' homes. Numbers 1 – 7 indicate locations of some present-day Cragsmoor landmarks. Source: Bruyn, Cantine and Oliver 1800. Courtesy of Ulster County Clerk's Office, Archives Division.

- 1 – "Pond" forms part of present-day Lake Maratanza
- 2 – Sam's Point
- 3 – Mt. Meenhaga
- 4 – Stone Church
- 5 – Cragsmoor Post Office
- 6 – The Cragsmoor Free Library and the Cragsmoor Historical Society
- 7 – Intersection of Route 52 and Cragsmoor Road

According to Tantillo, John Mentz was born in 1752 and died in 1824. Our reading of primary documents shows him to be one of at least five surviving children of Christoffel Mentz, a German immigrant, and Margaritta Grenewald. All but John were baptized at the Shawangunk Dutch Reformed Church, located in Bruynswick. The church was built in the 1750s and

still stands today. John Mentz's marriage record and Sylvester's History of Ulster County, New York indicate that he, like his siblings, was born in the Town of Shawangunk near present day Rutsenville and continued to live there before moving to the mountain. Assuming this is so, John Mentz would have grown up in the mountain's shadow.

During the Revolutionary War, John Mentz served in the Ulster County Militia's Fourth Regiment, composed mostly of local men. His father's nearest neighbor, Lieutenant Col. Johannes Jensen, was among the regiment's commanding officers. In 1777, a year after the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, John married Annatje Mack at the Dutch Reformed Church in Wawarsing. The church records describe her as "a young woman, born and residing below Wawarsing."

The Revolutionary War and John's service in the local militia formed the backdrop for the early years of the couple's marriage. That they and their families may have suffered more than most is suggested in one of the Shawangunk region's most enduring legends, "The Murder of John and Elsie Mack." Legends such as this, former Town of Wawarsing Historian Katharine T. Terwilliger reminds us, "help round out the story." How much truth there is in the legend remains uncertain. It is useful, however, to remember that this tale and others like it were originally collected from people who were alive when these events occurred.

Most likely set in the year 1780, the legend describes the murder of John and Elsie Mack, Annatje Mentz's father and younger sister, as they returned to their home in

Wawarsing after visiting the Mentz family home in the Town of Shawangunk. With John Mentz serving as their guide across the mountain, the Macks were attacked and killed by a raiding party of Tories and Native Americans. Mentz managed to escape but would be forever haunted by his failure to save his in-laws' lives. This was only compounded by the fact that

among the attackers, he recognized his former friend, “the notorious Indian, Shanks Ben.” The legend states that Mentz and Shanks Ben once “lived on terms of intimacy” and hunted together, an activity for which they had become “famous.” It is said that for years afterward, Mentz shed “a flood of tears” whenever he recalled the awful day. In one variant of the legend, Mentz ultimately took his rifle and disappeared into the wilderness for an entire year, eventually finding and killing Shanks Ben.

By 1800, the date of Mentz’s purchase of the Expense Lot, he and Annatje had become the parents of at least nine children. Census data tell us that by 1810, the Mentz household, then consisting of seven persons, had moved to present-day Cragsmoor, presumably to the Expense Lot and possibly into one of the two houses shown on the 1800 map. John Mentz’s older sons and daughters were already on their own by 1810, married, and with their own families. Some remained in the Wallkill Valley where primary documents tell us they had been born and baptized. The others eventually moved to the mountain, owning and farming their own land. Over the next two decades, deeds indicate that John proceeded to settle all five sons within portions of the Expense Lot as well as within the adjoining Lot VI. The first of the sons to receive land from their father and join him on the mountain was 23-year-old Christopher, a newly married farmer, who in 1807 received a 144-acre lot located in the southern portion of the Expense Lot. John sold the land to his son for \$1, “for and in consideration of the natural Love and affection he hath and beareth towards the said Christopher.” The 1810 census shows Christopher living there with his wife and two small daughters. Although the documents tell us that Christopher died young, prior to 1820, the names of the surviving sons—William Rhodes Mentz, Severyn Mentz, John Mentz Jr. and Jacob Mentz—continue to appear in deeds for land on the mountain through the 1830s.

Jacob and Severyn joined their father on the mountain between 1810 and 1820, and William and John Jr. after the latter date. All were farmers although one, Jacob Mentz, is remembered as also having been a “furrier” during the 1820s and 1830s. Legrande Botsford, in his early twentieth-century manuscript history of Cragsmoor, describes “the hat shop” where Jacob Mentz processed furs into caps, which

he then “disposed of” in Newburgh. Although most of Cragsmoor’s early nineteenth-century inhabitants had cleared the forests for farming, some in the Mentz family apparently persisted in the traditional mountain pursuits of hunting and trapping.

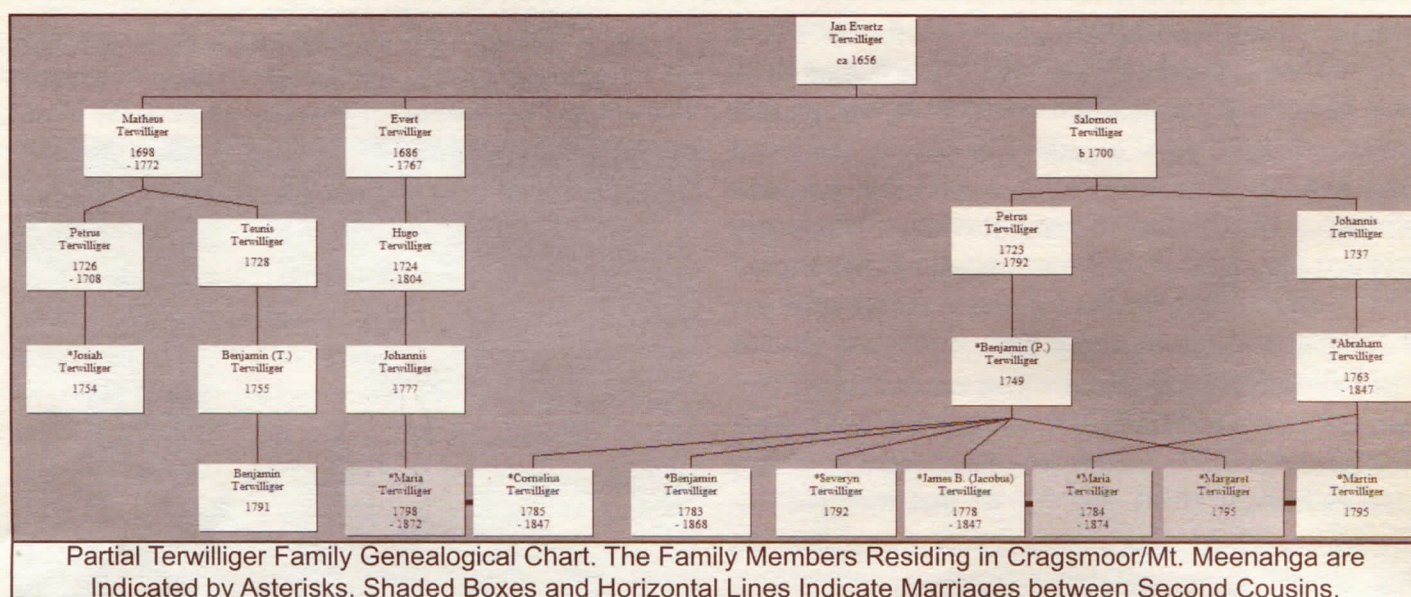
The Terwilliger Family: Pioneer Settlers of Mt. Meenahga

The Terwilliger family has had a long association with the Shawangunk Ridge, stretching from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century. All of the family’s mountain residents were related and all were descended from Evert Dircksen Terwilliger, who arrived in New Netherlands in March 1662, from Vianen, Holland. We have been able to determine their probable identities by analyzing deeds, census records, and genealogical sources. To help the reader follow the relationships among the various Terwilligers on the mountain in the early nineteenth century, this article includes a genealogical chart constructed from information given in the documentary sources.

The first known members of the Terwilliger family to live on the mountaintop were Josiah Terwilliger, his wife, and two children. They were among the handful of families who stayed here following the 1800 partitioning described in the Introduction. Their home is visible on the 1800 map, in the eastern portion of Lot VIII, a short distance north of the present location of Route 52. Census data indicates that Josiah left the mountain and may have died between 1800 and 1810. Seven other Terwilliger men, however, became heads of mountain households between the end of the eighteenth century and ca. 1820. These seven families resided in the area now known as Mt. Meenahga.

Following the ca. 1800 partitioning of the Schoonmaker/Hornbeck tract, Benjamin P. Terwilliger (baptized 1749) acquired Lot II, situated immediately north of the South Gully. Benjamin P. and his cousin Abraham Terwilliger (1763-1847) were both great-grandsons of Evert Dircksen Terwilliger and pioneer settlers at Mt. Meenahga. Benjamin P. and his wife, Eve Hasbrouck (baptized 1753), had a large family consisting of five surviving sons and four daughters. By 1800 they were residing on the mountain, possibly initially occupying the house shown on the 1800 map near the summit of Mt. Meenahga.

Between 1810 and 1820, Benjamin P.’s name ceases to appear in the census records thus suggesting that



he had died during this period. However, during the first decades of the nineteenth century, his sons reached adulthood, married and established their own homes at Mt. Meenahga. At some point prior to 1810, James B. (Jacobus) Terwilliger (1778-1764), and Cornelius Terwilliger (1785-1847) became the first to do so. Both married second cousins named Maria, also descendants of Evert Terwilliger. These two marriages produced 20 children, in addition to the three children Cornelius brought with him from an earlier marriage. After 1820, James and Maria moved to Lenawee County, Michigan, where they lived for the remainder of their lives. Cornelius continued to be listed in the 1830 and 1840 censuses, presumably still living at Mt. Meenahga.

By 1820, Benjamin P. Terwilliger's two other sons, Severyn T.B. (baptized 1792) and Benjamin B. (1783-1868), were also living in their own homes at Mt. Meenahga. The household of Severyn and his second wife, Julie Ann Moule (Mould, 1809-1891) would eventually include eight children. They left the mountain by the time of the 1830 census but would continue to reside elsewhere in the Town of Wawarsing. Benjamin B. and his wife Margaret established a typical mountain household of 10 persons and continued to live at Mt. Meenahga at least through 1850.

Benjamin P.'s first cousin, Abraham (I.) Terwilliger (1763-1847), a Revolutionary War veteran, was another early Mt. Meenahga settler. He and his wife Catrina Heyn married in 1783 and had five children. His Revolutionary War military pension record indicates

that he moved from the Town of Shawangunk to the Town of Wawarsing (presumably to Mt. Meenahga) in 1811. The 1830 census record and Abraham's pension application suggest that he and his household had left the mountain and returned to Shawangunk.

Abraham's son Martin (Martinus), born 1795, was a veteran of the War of 1812. He established his own household in the Mt. Meenahga area between 1810 and 1820, most likely after the War. He had married his second cousin Margaret, a daughter of Benjamin P. Terwilliger. (Martin's sister, Maria, had also married one of Benjamin P.'s children, James/Jacobus.) By the time of the 1820 census, Martin and Margaret had two children. A third child was born in 1834. That Martin would live on the mountain, or nearby, well into old age is suggested in an 1886 painting of him by the prominent Cragsmoor artist, E.L. Henry. It bears the inscription "Martin Terwilliger at the age of 95."

What does the story of the Terwilliger family tell us about life in early Mt. Meenahga? The three documented intermarriages suggest the close-knit nature of the community. As depicted on the 1800 map, it would appear to have been a more isolated and difficult place to live than the portion of the Shawangunk Ridge that would become Cragsmoor. The map shows two roads in the latter area, providing access on foot and possibly by wagon (at least in good weather) to Walker Valley and the town of Shawangunk. In contrast, no roads are shown in the Mt. Meenahga area. This absence of roads would have made it difficult to transport agricultural goods to market. Thus we assume that the early

nineteenth-century residents made a living primarily by subsistence farming. The Gully Road, supposedly created in 1824, and the Ellenville-Newburgh Plank Road dating to 1851, would have later improved access to both sides of the mountain.

The association of the Terwilliger family with the Mount Meenahga area continued into the early twentieth century. Perhaps most notable was the establishment of a resort there in the 1880's by Uriah E. Terwilliger, a great-grandson of Benjamin P. Terwilliger. Uriah called his new hotel "Mt. Meenahga." This portion of the Shawangunk Ridge, occupied by several generations of Terwilligers, gradually assumed the name of the hotel. In her book *Wawarsing, Where the Streams Wind*, Uriah's granddaughter, historian Katharine T. Terwilliger, explains that the name originated in a line from Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha*: "Hiawatha....saw the blueberry, Meenahga." It was, she tells us, Uriah's way of honoring the berries that grew on the mountain. The focus of our next article will be the other families who settled the Cragsmoor plateau during this early period of its development, including the Evans, Coddington and Goldsmith families. Additionally, we will also explore a previously unknown aspect of Cragsmoor's history - the presence here of at least one slave-owning family.

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