THE WASSAIC KILNS
To local officials planning to attend the September 1\textsuperscript{st} site meeting at the Wassaic Charcoal Kilns ~

Some in attendance may have limited knowledge about kilns and their historical importance to the area.

To make the best use of the limited time allotted for the site meeting a brief summary of the history is being provided along with early period photos and documented shots of the restoration work currently underway.

For those seeking a more in-depth history a visit to the Amenia Historic Department located in Town Hall would be beneficial.

Thank you very much for your time and interest in this project. I look forward to seeing everyone on September 1\textsuperscript{st}!

Sincerely,

Bernie Leighton
Our future is determined by what we do now and what we learn from the past. Preserving the past is critical for the benefit of future generations. The Wassaic Kilns were at the forefront of the industrial revolution that became the foundation of what America is today.
Mines, Blast Furnaces Once Dotted Dutchess’ Scenic Harlem Valley

By HELEN MYERS

Even when you know it's hard to believe that the beautiful Harlem Valley, now essentially agricultural, was once an area of iron ore mines, blast furnaces and charcoal pits.

The mining and the making of pig iron began before the Revolution and reached its peak in 1800, when 40,000 tons of ore were mined in Dutchess County. Two local mines were said to be the largest producers in the state.

However, as the demand for iron declined, so did the industry.

For the next few decades, the area turned to agriculture, but the memories of the past lingered.

"This is my country, my country," he said. "The Harlem Valley is a land of iron ore."
The Wassaic Charcoal Pits are all that remain of the Reed, Gridley & Co. Iron Works, which remained open to the mid-to-late 1920s. The charcoal made in the pits was used to fire the Gridley Blast Furnace. Constructed of stone, the pits are about 30 feet in diameter with an entrance about six-feet high. It took about three weeks of slow burning to transform wood into charcoal. This charcoal was used for fuel in the blast furnace because of its low sulfur content which is harmful to iron.

More specifically, the survey reported that Gridley Mine, situated at Amenia adjacent to the old Amenia mine, opened in 1825. Proprietors in 1877 were N. Gridley and Son, Wassaic, NY. Operations in 1877 included one 15 horsepower engine, one tubular boiler 30” x 12”, one No. 5 Knowles pump, 4” suction. Ore drawn up from the mine in carts was washed in a Newbould washer; transported in wagons two and one half miles to the furnace at Wassaic, where it was smelted into charcoal pig iron. Capacity in 1877 was 8,000 tons per year.
In addition, more history about the mine was provided in the survey. In 1825 the N. Gridley and Son iron works – also referred to as the Deep Hollow Iron Factory or Wassaic Furnace – was established at the hamlet of Wassaic, immediately south of the project site. Nathaniel and Noah Gridley, Joseiah Reed, and Leman Bradley built their works covering several acres, purchased the Amenia mine, and began iron production. When Gridley and Son built their furnace in 1826, it was 32 feet high and nine feet across. It was driven by an overshot wheel powered by the Wassaic Creek, measuring about 22 feet in diameter, and six feet at face. Two blowing cylinders provided for warm blast. Brown hematite ore from Amenia was used alone or mixed with other ore to produce iron. The process required about two tons of ore, limestone, and roughly 150 bushels of charcoal to produce one gross ton of iron.

In 1844 the iron works and mine was purchased by Noah Gridley and his son, William, who continued the venture. Over the 40 years that Gridley’s furnace was in operation, it was also noted by Amenia Historical Society, the hills surrounding Deep Hollow, including those in the western part of the project site, were heavily denuded in the harvest of timber for charcoal. According to the Survey history, “Noah Gridley’s wealth allowed him to essentially grow the community of Wassaic by building a chapel, luring Gail Borden’s
Condensed Milk Factory to the town, and convincing Commodore Vanderbilt and Jay Gould to continue the train north. The village of Wassaic essentially became a company town, with Borden and Gridley bolstering the local economy."

A historic photo provided by the Town of Amenia showed the 150-year old uncommon charcoal furnaces at the Wassaic end of Deep Hollow Road. Although they were no longer used, the 1898 photo showed them as they appeared.
Gridley Chapel

For years Noah Gridley's wife had been attending the South Amenia Presbyterian Church and taking neighbors in her carriage. Time came when there were just too many neighbors and not enough room to carry them all in her carriage. The solution? Build a chapel in Wassai. In 1873 the Gridley's built a beautiful chapel for the hamlet which also provided Sunday school.

New York Condensed Milk Company

The Wassai factory was founded in 1861 and built in cooperation with Noah Gridley and the financial backing of Jeremiah Milbank. The Wassai factory was Gail Borden's third effort at canning condensed milk (Wolcottville, CT and Burwell, CT were the first two). The Wassai factory was a primary supplier to the Union Army during the Civil War. The milk factory is closed and the building is now used by the Pawling Corporation. Gail Borden's Eagle Brand Condensed Milk is still sold today in supermarkets nationwide.
HISTORY
PROJECT WORK
CONTACT DETAILS

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