Spanning the Gap

The Dutch Mines: Fact or Myth? <



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Did the Dutch mine in this area?

Local historians credit the Dutch with starting the mining operations in the valley. The Dutch, it is said, sent exploration parties south searching for valuable minerals out from Dutch settlement at Esopus on the Hudson River (near Kingston NY), which was settled in 1614. The green *malachite* visible in the rock here indicated the possible presence of copper sulfide, or *chalocite*, an ore of interest.

The story continues, to claim that 104-mile Old Mine Road was constructed to haul ore from the area of Pahaquarry Copper Mines to Esopus for shipment to Holland. From there it could be shipped down the Hudson and to Holland.

The story seems to have started with publication of the Preston Letters in Hazard's Register in 1828. The letters tell about Hazard's trip in 1787 to the area and the stories he heard from local elders. He relates the journey of Thomas Penn's surveyors in 1730, who came here to survey previous claims. Preston wrote the mines had not been operated for some time, as the entrances were much overgrown with brush in 1787.

But what is the evidence?

Evidence in defense of the story includes:

Hazard has a reputation as an authoritative

Historic Mining at Pahaquarry



The Copper Mill around 1905. Its foundations were later used for a boy scout mess hall.



Incline plane at the Copper Mines.

The copper ore at Pahaquarry is of very poor grade and is very diffuse in the rock. While it has teased along hope in three different centuries at least, in the end it has caused each successive mining

source.

- The Dutch West India Company was seeking profitable minerals.
- Claus De Ruyter and Stuyvesant conducted explorations in the area.
- A bar of copper that sank with the ship transporting it to Holland.
- The unlikelihood of successful mining, due to the poor grade of the ore, does not preclude that the Dutch were here and had a try at mining anyway.

Evidence *against* the story, however, must include:

- The letters relate hearsay evidence and were written many years after the fact
- The "Neversink" or "Minisink" mentioned in some accounts could refer to the Neversinks along the New Jersey coast
- Claus DeRuyter, who was asked about a sample of pure copper which had been shipped over, said it did NOT come from the "South" (Delaware River) but from a "crystal mountain" in New Jersey
- The failure of no less than 5 attempts to profitably extract copper ore (See note at right), with more modern methods, between 1753 and 1918, and the lack of technology in the 17th century to process such low grade ore would seem to indicate the unlikelihood of such a venture.
- There are no written accounts of how the ore was extracted or treated prior to transportation.
- Tools and equipment for mining and road construction could not have been made in this country, and again, there are no records of the equipment having been imported.
- Despite claims that ore arrived in Holland in 1650, there are no records of consignments of
- There is a lack of 17th century archeological material at the site.

And as for Old Mine Road:

operation to fail.

The earliest documentary evidence for mining in the area is a partnership formed between John Reading, Anthony Maxwell and Martin Ryerson to mine copper in 1753 or 1754. It proved unprofitable and ceased by 1760. Hope sprung up in 1829 when after years of being inactive, Joseph Reading (presumably a son or grandson) and his partner Thomas Gordon gave a grant of 999 years for the purpose of digging, searching and exploring for copper. If nothing was found in five years, the grant was void. And that's what happened.

Hope sprung up again in 1847 after copper was discovered in the upper peninsula of Michigan. The Allegheny Mining Company was formed. After much work, it was once again found that the ore was too low in copper content to sustain a profit. From 1848 to 1849, the Pahaquarry Mining Company attempted to mine the area. On April 3, 1867, the company sold out.

There were two more tries from 1901 to 1912. First, by the Allegheny Mining Company and later by its successor, the Montgomery Gold Leaf Company and a reborn Pahaquarry Copper Company. Changes were made in 1908 and mines were operating again in 1911 by the Pahaquarry Copper Company. During three months of full operation, ore concentrations were shipped. The mine closed in 1913.

- What was the feasibility of building a 104-mile road and transporting very heavy low grade ore to Esopus?
- The route of Old Mine Road would have crossed territory of Native Americans who may not have been friendly,
- There were not many inhabitants in Esopus at the time to build such a road and mine.
- There are no written accounts of how the road was built or financed.

It remains possible that the Dutch **did** dig exploration holes, rather than pursuing a full-scale mining operation. The English then took control of the area in 1664. Mining operations from the 1700s to the early 1900s are a matter of historical record. (See note at right.)

Mining activity ended, at long last, with the bang of a Sheriff's hammer on November 2, 1918.



The oil house around 1910. The building was later expanded into a boy scout trading post.

The Copper Mines and Old Mine Road Today

Approximately 20 different features rmain at Pahaquarry as evidence of its mining operations.

Remnants of the milling plants, boarding house, power house, and other buildings can be seen in addition to two *adits* or horizontal shafts. The mine site, including part of a foundation, was used as a boy scout camp from 1924 until the 1960s when the land was purchased by the federal government for the recreation area.

As for Old Mine Road, regardless of when it was built or who was responsible for building it, the road does have a great deal of historical significance. General Gates marched seven regiments of men down the road to meet General Washington prior to his crossing the Delaware. These troops were important to Washington's victory at Trenton in 1777.

This article, originally published in 1988, was entirely revised in 2004, and updated with the note on historical mining, by park historican Susan Kopczynski



Two visitors to the Copper Mines in the resort era around 1900.



A ranger-guided tour in 1988. (These tours are no longer given.)