

“I REMEMBER WHEN “ CONTINUATION

January 2008:

“My resting place”

Aunt Annie called her home on the Valley road “My resting place” as she had wrote it on the back of an old sepia colored photograph that still exists. The back of the house was a long porch with a short



set of wooden stairs to the back door that opened into the kitchen. Not much remembered about that except a hallway that led out to the front of the house and the parlor where we had dinner at the big table.

The windows hung with long floor length drapery and I remember a tall grandfather clock with its pendulum swinging back and forth. I think I recall some sort of large barrel in the hallway, possibly for cider or wine. The main room or guest room was dark and foreboding and no one was allowed in there without Aunt Annie’s permission. I remember going up flights of stairs to the attic floor where there was a long table, littered with Aunt Annie’s brick-a brats and odds and ends she had collected. I remember the staircases, perhaps at least three to get up there and the ebony handrails along the sides, but not much else. As I was only 4 or 5 at the time, memories are dim. I remember the old barn out back but never going in it. I remember going with dad to pick peaches and pears on the old trees along the property line with what us kids always called “The Hadinger house”. But of course, that was the original Henry I Spear homestead farm.

Lyda remembers going inside once and seeing a huge fieldstone fireplace that could be walked into. It had a large timber mantle. Not much else is remembered. The outside front, even then was a white wash color and the front steps were of concrete faced, probably laid up in field stone.

This house is presently where the Hen’s Roost restaurant is today, more actually where the exit road is going out to 202. The house across the street was known as the ASPEN WOOD TOURIST house, sort of an early day “bed and breakfast”. It may originally have belonged to the Ryerson family and as far as I know is still standing, although having been radically renovated over the years.

Aunt Annie’s house, as we youngsters called it was first built by her father, my great grandfather, David H. Spear, grandson of Henry I {J} Spear. The date it was built is unknown but David H was born about 1857 or 58. In later years he was a prosperous farmer and well known village leader.

Oakland, the actual town was not incorporated until 1904. Before that the area was simply known as the “Ponds”. It had that name ever since the first Dutch settlers came to the area in the late 1600’s or early 1700’s. It was probably a contraction of a Lenapi name, long since gone with an Indian dialect that today has been completely lost. The earliest Dutch settlers referred to the area as “DePanne”

it had been anglicized after the English take over in 1674 as “the Ponds” The name comes from the many natural water courses and impoundments that were found in that area of the lower Ramapo Valley.

Passaic Falls, Paterson 1898

The nearest settlement of any size would have been “Slooterdam” which is the old name for Paterson. This was many miles away to the east, beyond High Mountain, that overlooks present day Haledon and North Haledon. A wilderness road came to the Ponds from that direction. It skirted the ancient natural lake the Lenapi called “Crystal eye” because of its clear pure cold waters. To the South, beyond the “great curving mountain ridge, that plunges abruptly to the Ramapo river and a few more miles away , originally was an Indian village situated in a gentle loamy plain that today is completely absorbed by private homes and streets of the Village of Pompton Lakes. This was located on the west side of the river and toward the land running to Federal Hill in Bloomingdale. The large wooded summit of this oblong shaped mountain was probably a stronghold for patriot forces during the Revolutionary war and so named.*1



In later years, farmers would plow up these fields and ultimately hundreds of years of evidence of Native American occupation there. My aunt at one time remembered this area as a peach orchard. After World War 2, the housing boom hit the area and houses were needed for returning war veterans. This and other likely locations soon were gobbled up for building new developments.

During the years of the American Revolution, George Ryerson developed a successful iron works at the foot of the natural dam that backed up what became known as Pompton Lake. The “Pumpton” Indians, were the original inhabitants here, a sub clan of the larger Lenapi nation. Their land reached all the way to what is today the New York State border and Sterling Forest. In pre-colonial days, the area was called the Township of Pompton. This took in all of the present day town, and also, Midvale, Haskell and Ringwood and was known as such up to 1860.



← Henry I Spear’s farm as it looked. The farm house that was once the “Green Cottage” visible on the far left. Just off center is the big barn built by David H. Spear. The foreground, potato fields that today are totally unrecognizable.

De Panne'

The "Pond's as it was known, in the early 1700's was the frontier, a wild and dangerous journey to make from Slooterdam, through thick woods, teeming with all manner of wildlife. Wolves, deer, bear and cougars abounded here. The streams were thick with beaver, muskrat and otter and other varieties. Ducks of all types, herons, and other water birds searched these watery regions for food. Perhaps even some woodland bison still could be found in the large meadows, as late as 1700. Elk and moose could also be discovered here, this was indeed a far cry from the urban sprawl we see today, although this is difficult to imagine as cars roar up and down busy route 208 and Franklin Lakes road.

A journey from the relative "civilized" towns around Slooterdam and the bend of the Passaic River would take a traveler along a rugged pathway, hardly suitable for wagons, along the base of High mountain and on to the sheltered hills of later day Franklin Lakes*2

The Clans of the Lenapi *The First people of the Ramapos*

** In the history of the Lenapi family of native Americans it is archived by scholars that there were three distinct groups or "Clans" with many sub groups or family clans. The "Turtle", the "Wolf" and the "Turkey"*

The Wolf clan of the Lenapi were called "Minsi" ; they lived in the old area of the Ramapos, the Ponds, and northward until they bordered lands of other tribes. These were perhaps the more warlike of the three, only because they were more apt to conflict with those more ferocious tribes of the North, who made up the Iroquois Confederation. The Unami peoples were of the Turtle clan. Some also lived near the Ponds area as may attribute to the old story of a flat rock being discovered in the Franklin Lake area with the Turtle totem engraved in it. These were known by other Lenapi as "the people who lived down river" They principally settled in the river valleys and rolling plains of later day Bergen and Passaic and Union counties and some perhaps as far south as the central pine barrens region and westward along the Delaware and the eastern part of Pennsylvania.

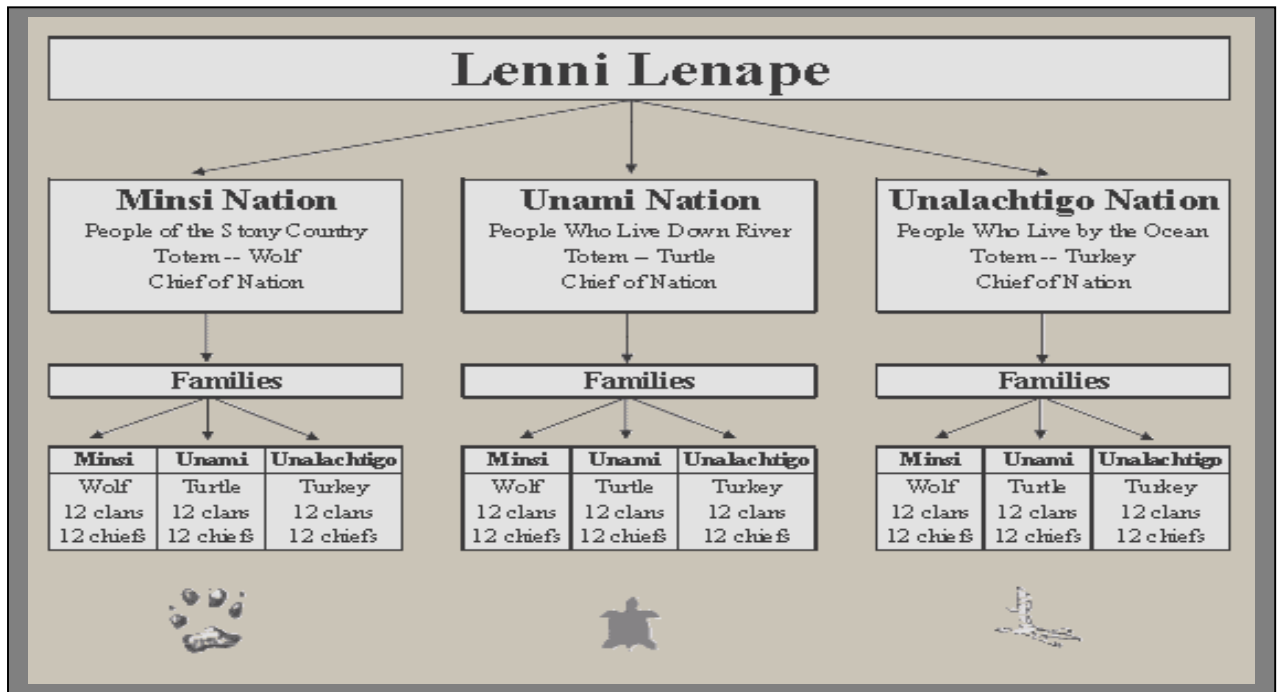
The Unalachtigo or "people who lived by the ocean" were of eastern New Jersey, along the shore areas and much of the remaining area of the Central and southern pinelands and may perhaps had extended into neighboring modern Delaware, Maryland until reaching the confluence of Chesapeake bay and the Atlantic. All these family groups and clans made up the Lenni-Lenapi culture. The Algonquin peoples referred to the Lenapi as the "Grandfathers", speaking of an early time in their spoken history when these people migrated eastward from the Illinois country, perhaps the progenitors of most of the eastern tribes. Still farther back, some have speculated they were the remaining elements of the mysterious "mound builder" culture that once flourished throughout Kansas, Iowa , Illinois and Kentucky.

The Lenapi the first whites encountered were principally of a peaceful nature, not like their northern neighbors of the Iroquois Confederation. The very name Iroquois means "Warrior".

Each main clan of the Lenapi, the Wolf, Turtle, Turkey had a unique structure that was composed of twelve sub-clans & family groups with twelve chiefs or sachems. A system of thirty-six such groups. Each of the three principals had a "Chief" or

Sachem and all deferred to each other. The “elder” of the three Sachem’s thought to have had the greatest influence- this varied as time went on and the influence of one perhaps overshadowed the others. But all the sachems collaborated together about issues that concerned the greater good of all the people. There really was no one “Commander-in Chief” so to speak, but rather a system where all discussed and came to conclusions of how best to approach issues. Perhaps the purest of “Democratic” reasoning as never practiced since! To that, we can thank our native Americans as the true believers of Democracy.

Most native American tribes used this logic to represent their peoples- it was only after the white settlers brought their forms of government to these shores when the real changes started, and not too soon after the pilgrims set forth from Massachusetts Bay colony or the Dutch from Manhattan island.



“Crystal Eye”

On a gentle slope of land just west of later day Franklin Lake , in ancient times was a Native American Indian campsite. Some say there had been a large flat stone found there with the carving of a turtle on it, but like all stories, if this was factual, the stone has long since disappeared, either re-buried by construction work or is secluded in someone’s corner rock garden, it’s historical meaning going unnoticed. A house now occupies the exact spot where Lenapi long houses once stood and cooking fires smoked venison. It must have been a peaceful vision to imagine 500 years ago there. The natives called it “Crystal eye” for its pure clear waters.

The Lenapi, which is a general name given to the many clan tribes that lived in the area from the east coast to Pennsylvania. One such clan was that of the Turtle, another, “the Wolf”, still another the Bear, and certainly others. The Lenapi was a main tribe of Algonquin extraction, some believe were actually the fore-runners of the dreaded Iroquois nation. They originally migrated east from the Mississippi region of the American mid-west and may have even been off spring of the long lost Mound-builder civilizations that had vanished from that area without a trace. At one time, it’s said, the Lenapi were even more ferocious and warlike than the later Iroquois, wiping out lesser tribes as they moved eastward. The few natives that the Pilgrims actually first encountered in Massachusetts may have been the last remnants of the very first natives that had been spared by the approaching Lenapi and the later-day Iroquois.

Flint

At the back end of the big lake and in a rugged prehistoric defile in the mountain, there was a vein of pure flint, suitable for making spear points and arrow heads. It could be found, down low on the east wall of this defile, at ground level, all but hidden by overburden. Jack O’leary and I once found it there on one of our hiking jaunts of the area but in a few short years, on returning, I found that local landscapers had used it as a dumping ground and completely covered it up with debris. The “back swamp” as it was called was a prehistoric waterway that hooked around low hills and stretched westward for nearly a mile.

Later-day Indian Trail drive in McBride’s Urban Farm development crossed it as it still does today about a mile South of Franklin lakes road. In the back yard areas of million dollar homes along the road, skunk cabbage erupts from the moist ground around its edges, just as it has probably done for a thousand years or more. In the Spring, mallard ducks and muskrats still live and swim in the narrow meandering stream that cuts across it coming from the west. These are the headwaters of Crystal Lake brook that flowed across our Aunt Pearl’s back yard miles to the northwest and eventually joining Sicomac brook near ancient Camp Gaw. From that point on into Oakland it was collectively known at times as “High mountain brook” because it ran alongside the road of that name. It tumbled across the Valley road near the old Van Aulen house at the corner of Franklin avenue and route 202

(Valley road) after first turning the water turbine across the road of Vervaets woven label mill, known locally just as “The silk mill”. In later years, a large curving swampy section of river bottom was excavated by the Potash brothers and made into a large lake, bordered by post-war housing. “The Big Lake” as it was called by school kids, became a private community permit only beach. The waters finally poured over the concrete dam and into the Ramapo river nearby.

Some said that quicksand was in it and it has never been built on. The property of Dave Flitcroft edged the shoreline of it, and it was used as a water source for his nursery operations. Jack O’leary’s property went back into it also and he had a small pothole dug in it, also for irrigation. Today, it’s completely built full of half million dollar homes in that area and the old nursery grounds are gone. The old Franklin Lakes airport that once occupied the relatively flat ground across that road is likewise a “house farm” now as well. I always maintained that in even earlier times, the water from the Lily Pond may have drained to it but I never fully concluded that., and the water that collected in the still farther west “pothole” swamp had likewise drained to the Lily pond

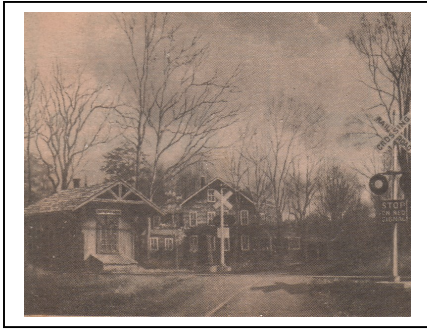
In the 1980’s, Rex Lawson and his crew working for the McBride company completed a long pipeline from this “pothole” pond, down the sand hill to empty into the stream that joined with that from the Big Spring, forever altering it’s natural course and perhaps also, affecting the water table in that area. This permitted water to freely flow from the Lily pond and westward now- into the old pothole, now scoured out and down this pipeline. When I worked for the Company in the 1980’s I helped install a storm drain system in the Industrial Park. We had dug down perhaps fifteen feet or more into the rough rocky ground, exposing 18,000 years or more of glacier deposited moraine subsoil. We hit a fast flowing underground stream and channeled it into the drain that emptied to the old pot hole pond.

Farther back in the Industrial Park ground which before that had been hunting ground for my family, their were 3 other “sunken ponds we called them. The largest was a swamp that became an impoundment after heavy rains. It was a great hide-out for ducks and water birds. The shores were heaviliy wooded and nearly impenetrable to reach open water. It may still even exit today as I have not been there for many years. Two very small ponds were nothing more than deep holes that periodically filled with water. They were part of my brothers “trap line” where he caught muskrats and raccoons for pelts. This was long before McBride’s Industrial Park was there.

In the area west of the open fields of Jake Witty’s “cabbage patch” as we called it were found two huge curious nearly circular holes in the woods. A pathway ran between them on a ridge. We called them the “rabbit warrens” and during hunting season would send our hound dog “major” down into them to flush out any critters. I often speculated on how these holes formed. A third one with it’s nearly open side toward the west was a few yards beyond the second. They must have been remnants made by the Ice Age as the weight of tons of ice pressed down, slowly melting and leaving these impressions. Sadly, they have been only memories for a long time for that old area had been completely obliterated by the later Industrial Park.

I often fondly recall how that area looked back then with an occasional old barb wire fence post marking some long forgotten property line. I could still probably sit down today and draw every inch of it’s terrain on a map. As a kid, I knew it as good

as my back hand, every rabbit hole and squirrels nest, old tree, and dried up water course, every pile of rocks and every odd ball hole in the ground was my backyard.



<- Crystal Lake railroad station

From “Crystal eye” the wilderness road of 1664, hardly more than an Indian path continued west through dark woods. It skirted a sullen depression in the land, an Ice Age remnant that had filled with melt water from a retreating glacier 18 millennium ago. In modern times it became known as the “Bird Sanctuary” or “The Lily Pond” *3

This proved also to be a favorite place of mine to explore. Old evidence of beaver chewing’s could still be found there in ancient trees along the shore. The truck farm of Jake Witty used it as a water source for his fields., and in dry summers, it’s shallow depth would dry up like a dusty desert. Jake had, had channels excavated in the bottom to find water for his fields and these proved to be great fishing holes!

The 1664 pathway would have gone around this natural depression through the hills, that had been scalloped out by the glaciers until finally it would descend the eastern slope of the valley that ultimately ended in “The Ponds”. The Pond Hill road at that point (Later day Long Hill Road) was a long slow descending trail, with a small brook lacing it’s sides to the bottom. Along the way, the path would pass the later day farmhouse of John H Spear and farther down on the left, of his brother, Jacob. At the bottom of this hill and a short distance would be the later ;1710 location, early pioneers built the first log church at the junction of two Indian trails, one coming from Pompton, the other from the northern mountains. The “Ponds” had been reached in this manner by the earliest white settlers.

The home-stead farm on Valley road & Green Cottage

The farm fields behind Aunt Annie’s house once were cultivated by Great grandfather David H. He became known as an experimenter with new types of fertilizers and methods of tilling the soil to produce crop yields. The land here had always been fertile, a result of a long ago Ice Age that brought quality soil here from the farther North regions of the Highlands. The lower Ramapo Valley had been the terminal moraine for the great Wisconsin ice sheet. The bulldozed remnants of soil and sand were left here as the ice retreated as much as 18,000 years ago. A huge reserve of sand was shoved into this corner of the valley. Eons before the Ice sheet, perhaps as long as a billion years ago, this area was the bottom of an ocean.

As youngsters we would often find “mud balls”, prehistoric ovals of soil that had coalesced into soft rock. They held hundreds of sea shells, trilobites and other ancient relics. I was fascinated when an earth moving company began digging into my grandfather’s old sand works behind our house and laid bare rock strata like the pages of a book. Here was the history of the world, right here in sedimentary deposits you could see. Unfortunately, it wasn’t of any scientific interest to those who only saw it as a source of fill, to sell for profit. The area was stripped cleared in a relatively short span of years until all that is left is a sand pit.

David H’s farm had been handed down from his father. John H. who had also farmed the land with his father, Henry. We believe Henry first bought the major part of the acreage in 1832, but he had farmed and been located in the “Ponds” for many years earlier as attested to early records of the Church. A family story says that during the years of the Civil War, the home was also a local tavern known as the “**Green Cottage**” Henry had been born in 1795 and by that time in 1860 would have been sixty-five. He lived a long prosperous life and passed away in 1887. We don’t have any other information about the “Green Cottage” but it paints a pastoral scene for travelers coming up the dusty Valley road from a long day’s journey to stop for a welcomed glass of ale or home-grown cider, and possibly even if there were accommodations there, a needed nights rest as well, before traveling on the next day for Suffern and points north.



“Roots and branches of a family tree”

Coming originally from the Sloaterdam area, the branches of the Spear family had spread out from its earliest beginnings with Hendrick Janzen Spier who was living in New Amsterdam by 1652. That is the year he and Magdalena Hans Van Swole were married. They had originally come from Holland and we think had already been living in the Dutch West India Company colony of New Amsterdam as early as 1646. In 1660, after returning from a trip to Holland, they again were in residence in New Amsterdam and by 1661, Hendrick and Magdaleena and family moved to the west side of the Hudson river, then called “The Noordt” river by the Dutch, and set up a frontier farm near Communipaw, today’s Jersey City.

In years to pass, the family grew, and the progenitors of Hendrick and Magdalena fanned out throughout the Hudson, Essex and Bergen county areas. At some point, young Henry I [J] Spear’s branch of the family had settled in Sloaterdam, and eventually, moved farther west, among the wild forests there, coming to the “Ponds”

Henry’s two sons, John and Jacob established large farms of their own. John’s been of a more mountainous and wooded area along the Pond Hill road (Long Hill road). It is suspected he was, as a result of this, heavily engaged in the lumber business, and was the first to develop water powered saw mill on the stream in what was known as the “wood lot”. The mill pond backed up a good size impoundment with a wooden dam. It ran a large overshot wheel, which turned the gears of the mill. The source of timber was mostly hardwood, for the ancient stands of pine and hemlock had long since been felled by the first settlers in the 1600’s.

Only scattered remnants of Red Pine were left in isolated bunches. As a youngster, I remember my dad called them “Bull pines”. They were favorite bedding down places for white tail deer and as a kid I often lay beneath their tall branches and listened to the wind roaring through their tops.

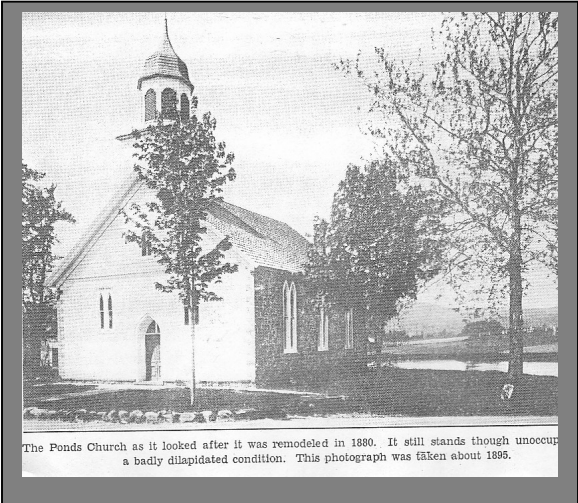
Jacob’s farm was by nature even more hilly, most of it lay on the west side of the Pond Hill road and along that hillside across to where the big Shoprite super market is today. He probably had dairy cows and possibly goats. This was not suitable land for pasturage for horses, as it was dotted by woods. Stone walls delineated coarse fields. At one time the two brothers had a business raising trout in the cold waters of the big Spring. Known as “The Spear Brothers trout farm” on an old map, it isn’t known how successful an operation it was. The big Spring there had been bubbling up out of the ground ever since the Ice Age, and as a kid, it was perhaps my most favorite place to be. Many happy afternoons I spent around the old spring, playing in the icy waters, and the surrounding woods, it was like my own brand of “darkest Africa” there and I was an intrepid explorer, long before there ever was an “Indiana Jones” era.

John and Jacob’s part in our family history also has a curious twist to it that even today is difficult to understand. Our family name has undergone several spelling changes since Hendrick (Spier) first arrived from Europe. The original spelling of SPIER, became SPEER at some point in the family’s spreading out across the land. During Grandfather Henry’s father’s time; John I (H) it became spelled with an “a” replacing the second “e” . This spelling often is seen either way with Henry I Speer/Spear, and was continued with his son, John H Spear, however, Henry’s other son and John’s younger brother kept the older spelling Jacob Speer. Jacob’s family with the exception of his youngest son and his wife all passed away at relatively young ages, Jacob himself at only forty-seven.

It was always speculated that later on, the remaining members of the family wanted to disenfranchise themselves from Jacob’s side of the family tree and so used the “a” in the spelling [SPEAR] Even the plot in the family cemetery reflects these different spellings between the two brothers. Curious, and there will probably never be an answer for it. One of those family mysteries that TV shows are patterned after.. “Do I hear a future episode of “History Detective” perhaps?!”

Early days

My father grew up as a youngster on the old farm homestead on the Valley road, in the homestead farm house there. There were big horse barns and a fenced in corral that went down to the Ponds corner. The babbling brook, crossed the dusty Valley road there as it began way up on the hill, back in the woods of John Spear’s wood lots. Across this early pre Continental highway stood the Ponds



The Ponds Church as it looked after it was remodeled in 1880. It still stands though unoccupied in a badly dilapidated condition. This photograph was taken about 1895.

Church, a sturdy country style building of simple Dutch architecture. It had a two door front and a tall steeple. Stained glass windows on either side. A pipe organ inside provided musical notes and Aunt Annie as a young girl was the organist for Church services. The old clapboard one room school house stood on the corner as it had been there ever since Revolutionary War days. John Haring had been the school teacher there during the time when General Washington marched his troops down the Valley road several times during that conflict.

The horse barns were destroyed by a devastating fire of which two dim celluloid photographs survive. It isn't know if any were rebuilt. Grandfather Andrew as it turns out did not have the farming talent his father had. He did some, but he was more astute with pencil and paper as a bookkeeper and accountant for a Paterson Company. What farming he did do was only as an after thought and most likely hired out the work to others. His talents proved to be in the financial and entrepreneurial pursuits.

Our father who was born in 1904 on the old homestead farm in the same year the town of "Oakland" became incorporated, grew up as a youngster in the woods and fields of his great grandfather's farm. The namesake of his own grandfather, who he never knew had passed away in 1898, and he was the only child of the family. His grandfather, David and Grandmother, Catherine Winters Spear had had two children; Andrew and Ann.

But the Oakland that I knew as a boy has taken on as many changes as that my father had know when he was a boy, from the way it had been in the days of the Revolutionary War. The church of the Ponds on the corner was removed in 1936, a small monument can be found there. The stone church that served before than had stood across the road from the later Church's front door. It had been used to corral horses in later years, it's said. No one really knows where the original 1710 log church was, but it was mostly likely at the same spot. The dusty Valley Road became macadamized in 1920. A more modern concrete culvert was installed that replaced the dirt covered wood plank bridge that had been there since 1812. Before that it had simply been a fording place that wagons splashed through. The Valley road, itself, had been a major north-south conveyance between the lower Passaic River valley and the strategic "clove" in the Ramapo Mountains near Suffern's tavern. It most likely followed the trek of an ancient Indian pathway between the village at Pompton and the northern mountains. It was an important route for Continental troops during the War of Rebellion; as the British called our Revolutionary War for Independence.

It provided access between Morristown and West Point and points north. It's said that Washington himself traveled no less than seven times past the old Church of the Ponds during the war and often paused there in consolation for his Army.

Between Ryerson's foundry at Pompton falls and Nyack, New York, there threaded a wilderness mountain road in later years called "Cannonball



Oakland station- The New Jersey Midland RR reached here in 1869, and the cluster of buildings that sprung up was called "Bushville" , named for Henry Wanamaker Bush's general store. Gradually the center of the later town shifted northward where the tracks were and eventually became "Oakland"*4

road". This was an important artery to haul munitions and armaments through the mountains to escape seizure by British patrols on the Valley road. The Ryerson house along the Valley Road was known as "The Fort" for its heavy brick construction which afforded some safety to General Washington's post "Around the bend" The road to Pompton



riders. A story goes that one of these was bushwhacked by Tories on the road and took refuge in the "fort". He died of his wounds and is said to have been buried out back in the garden.

As a youngster I often rambled the fields and woods of my home there and could sometimes imagine the place as it may have looked in my dad's youngster days, or perhaps even several hundred years earlier. Whenever I'd discover some long lost fossilized "mud ball" rock , crammed full of sea creatures from a epoch so far back it was difficult to comprehend, it would make me understand how insignificant we all are at times in the great scheme of things. Yet, as astronomically un-comprehensible as that seems, it was all very real, because there it was, right in my hands to see. I wondered if my great grandfather had ever held a similar object in his hands as a youngster in those same fields and woods and had the same thought?

Today, over fifty years have passed since I was a lad of twelve years young, wandering the woods and fields of my great great grandfather's farm in Oakland (The Ponds). Now living in Sussex County NJ, I hardly ever get down that way and for the past score of Years, my explorations are of this region.

To probably be continued.....

01/27/2008
At right ->

A photo "as it happened" of the horse barns afire at the homestead farm on Valley road
photographer unknown



***1 Federal Hill**

This large outcropping situated in parts of Passaic and Morris counties has history for many pioneer families of the area. Before the Revolutionary War, a tavern along the Pequannock river was a local establishment. It survived into the 1990's in various forms as a restaurant until fire finally consumed it one evening. Today there is only a vacant lot for fishermen to park in. Directly on the other side of the river at that point, the hill rose steeply. Rather than being comprised of a single summit, Federal hill is a series of steep valleys and hollows. A gas transmission line cuts across it and at the eastern end, it is all but decimated by the Passaic crushed stone quarry. Before World War 2, the hill was a meeting place for the American Nazi Party. They established a "bundt camp" on it's heights and some said were even engaged in stock piling armaments for a German-American uprising in support of

the fatherland. In the late 1930's, they held rallies and even marched in parades in town. After Pearl Harbor was attacked in 1941 and America entered the war in Europe and Asia, all this came to an abrupt halt, the American Nazi party disappeared over night and that was the end of the Bundt camp on Federal hill.

In much later years, when I joined the Forest Fire Service, our crew spent many an afternoon and weekend fighting brushfires with the Riverdale and Bloomingdale fire companies on and around Federal hill. The place was a favorite "fun place" for local youths that invariably somehow would set the woods afire with campfires or fireworks. The craggy height overlooking Hamburg Turnpike below was a favorite spot to play high-jinks. Even today, it is a high hazard area in the Spring and Autumn when wood smoke is in the air. The northward end of Federal hill continues in a long ridge that is finally cut by Union Avenue and a small stream that drains that area to the west. On the east and low along Ringwood Avenue is a long thin impounded stream called Posts' brook. It winds its way down from the western hills of the Boro of Ringwood and the eastern part of West Milford. It escapes out of those hills through an area called "the otter hole" and is sometimes referred to as Otter-hole brook, in that area. Its source is higher back toward Lindys' lake and several other boggy areas and a major tributary is from "Bear Swamp Lake" also known as Lake Arcadia, an almost unknown portion of secluded woods in the hills between Glenwild avenue and Macopin roads. My most memorable thoughts of that area was in the summer of 1988 when our fire crew fought several large wildfires there along the Blue trail.

To the northwest of Posts brook is the Norvin Green State forest, a large chunk of land, state owned and a favorite of hikers from the New Jersey Autobon's Weiss Ecology center on lower Snake den road. For many years this was my fire district as a District firewarden for New Jersey; my call sign was 2D10, and I had taken over that post from Herb Fowler when he retired and moved from the area.

***2 Franklin Lakes**

The area around ancient "Crystal eye" hardly resembles what it looked like a hundred years ago. Since the late 1950's it had been developed by the McBride Corporation into a high class residential community. The lake became private and only on its western shore could be accessed by fishermen and now, even that location is a private home.

As a youngster, I remember visiting a relative, Frank Smith, who lived in an old clap board house along the road, nearly across from the old cider mill that stood there. This was long before Urban Farms was a reality and the area was rural farm land. The mill had been there for well over a hundred years even by the 1950's and I remember going there with my brother to buy apple cider in the Fall of the year. At one time it had been operated by Emil Roth, a stout German fellow who lived on the Long Hill road at the time in my great great grandfathers old farm house near where Martha place meets the main road. Emil had taken over the old Spear farm at some point. He sold the land going up the wooded hillside there and had the road named for his wife; hence, Martha Place. As a boy, I can barely remember Mr. Roth, he was a great friend of our family and my father would often visit with him. Back in 1914, he was already at that point a grown man and managing the cider mill, a favorite story my father would tell at the dinner table was when Mr. Roth came and visited my grandfather one day when the European war was in full effect. 1914-1918. Obviously feeling the effects of a Sunday afternoon fest of "hard cider" on the

back porch of the old house on the Valley road, he boasted how “one German can lick ten Americans!” or words to that effect. Mrs Spear, my grandmother, hearing this, immediately took the kitchen broom to Emil’s boasting and “swept” him off the porch quite forcefully. My dad continued that “*Emil was very conciliatory after that and apologized to mother, explaining that it was only the hard cider talking and no real harm was intended!*”

Despite that innocuous confrontation, Emil Roth remained a friend of the family ever afterwards. I can barely remember him at the cider mill press at Franklin Lake, a long ago very dim memory.

Years afterward when I worked for the McBride Agency and after the old mill had been burned down by acts of vandalism, I discovered lying there in the brook an ancient water turbine that had once ran the workings of the mill. The Urban farms shopping center has for years now occupied the corner area of High Mountain road and Franklin Lakes road, and million dollar homes stand now where farm fields and Indian campsites once were. The only vestige as a reminder of that earlier time is the name, Mr. McBride tagged on his “Indian Trail Club”, the large barn that was turned into a recreation center and restaurant for his millionaire’s community. I myself worked for the McBride Corporation for eight years- but that’s another story....

The rugged defile at the back of the lake is an archaeological site, largely unknown. As mentioned, Indians knew of the vein of flint that was located there and gathered it for arrow heads among other objects. During Colonial times, it was said that it was used to corral horses in it. The prehistoric rock found there is columnar basalt, a result of up thrusting of billion year old volcanic rock that formed in curious veined upright sections. My dad called it “trap rock” and it was quarried by local people for years to build walls and foundations. I myself hauled many a pickup truck load of it for my rock gardens. The “Pass” as it was referred to was a natural cut through the mountainous terrain there. It allowed easy access through the hills from Franklin Lake into Wayne township on the south side of it. The broken rock that littered the old pathway there was extremely hazardous to tires and was not even easy to walk on. It was surely a well known Indian trail, probably used for several thousand years by the native people. McBride’s work men at one time had a huge pile of split firewood above the defile and had bull dozed a roadway up to it through the ancient rock. I haven’t been back to that area now for many years and don’t know if any of it still remains as I remember it. The Bergen and Passaic County line runs through the “Pass” from east to west there. A rough hiking trail was located over the summit of this ridge .. that area is now completely built full of “high end” homes and new roads. On the east side of the Pass, several old roads could be found that went up through the woods in the direction of High Mountain. As Federal Hill was in Bloomingdale- this area too was well known by our fire crew who often were called to fight wildfires there. The entry into that area, always a challenge to us and our brush trucks. It resulted in many a dented fender and an occasional broken axle to get to a fire scene. Reservoir road, delineates the county line to the northeast with the Boro of Franklin Lakes on the west and North Haledon to the east of it. Several winters worth of work, while working for the McBride Company, in the late 1970’s, our work crew spent hacking brush on the sides of those hills with “bank blades”, a simple looking long handled tool with a long thin double edged hooked end. The work was laborious, dangerous, and monotonous

and winter weather made it no better. I cringe even now when I think of all those long days doing that work. Many an afternoon of cold fingers and toes were spent, some of us were military veterans of the Vietnam era, we often wondered amongst ourselves, whether there was a better way to make a living, but in the end, it was always the same thought *“Well, it’s better than nothing and standing on a bread line somewhere!”* but truthfully at times, it really wasn’t “that” much better.

Our crew foreman at the time was Jake Witty, the same, who had operated the vegetable “truck farm” over by the Lily Pond for many years. Jake had once had a farm on Pancake Hollow road in Wayne. He had worked hard all his life and as a result of it had a bent over stoop to his back and a shuffle as he walked. But he was highly respected among the crew men and was a good and honest individual. His wise sayings and attitude toward life was often an inspiration to the rest of us on those long cold “brush hacking” afternoons.

The crew at Urban Farms were a bunch of real individuals. The Lawson family had worked for McBride for many years and they lived in Branchville and would make the drive from Sussex county daily. There was Bob Lawson, the office supervisor, his son, young Bob, a Vietnam vet and somewhat of a “loose cannon”, brother Rex, who operated the heavy equipment and was the ground foreman, his brother Tommy, a big Neanderthal type, good humored, strong as an ox and his favorite machine was the big four wheel Payloader. Barry Nye, of native American descent and also a Vietnam vet. He was usually a quiet sullen fellow who seemed to always have a chip on his shoulder about something. I learned later, in conversation with him, perhaps why he had that attitude. While in the Army in Vietnam, he was in combat and had his friend, a young Vietnamese soldier killed right along side him. His Vietnam experience obviously affected him in later life, but despite that, Barry and I became close friends and often went fishing together on our days off.

Over time, there were others that came and went, many Spanish guys from the streets of Paterson worked on the crew and then there was big John Halley. A huge good natured colored man who was perhaps the soul of the whole crew. When John was working with you there was always a cheerful laugh and respect for this gentle giant who had originally come from the South. He would daily chide Tommy Lawson as a “Big ga-loot” , and good naturedly brag how when he was younger he worked with mules that were smarter then Tommy!... At some point an acquaintance I knew from High School days came to work there, Jimmy Case, who had lived in Franklin Lakes. I had never known him in school as I lived in Oakland and anyone from the Urban Farms area was considered too high class to associate with. We however became common friends and for many years went fishing together and ball games and had a weekly routine of going out somewhere to dinner. Jimmy unfortunately also was an alcoholic and it was tough at times, but despite it, we remained buddies.

So much for that.....end of this chapter

***3 Lily Pond**

In 1975, we moved from our old homestead in the woods off Spear lane as we called it and into the old Bill Rose home on Long Hill road. For mother and I it was a big step up from our humble old home in the woods. I worked for McBride for eight years as has been told elsewhere in these memoirs. After that, in the winter of 1983, I went into business for myself and established "*Lily Pond Landscape*", naming it after the old Bird Sanctuary a short ways away. I was engaged in that for fourteen years and for the most part, I can recall it was satisfying hard work. That was a period in my life I think I was most happiest. I was my own boss, running my own business from my own place, and it was most gratifying. I had parted company with the McBride bunch under less than desirable circumstances, but enjoyed the freedom I had to decide my own situation.

Along with running my own business I had also joined the New Jersey Forest Fire Service, an experience I have never regretted to this day. I would not have had the wide range of memories and experiences that I still regard today as the most rewarding; save Naval Service, I've had if not for that.

More footnotes...

***4 Oakland's center**

When the earliest Dutch reached "De Panne" (the Ponds) they came from Sloomsterdam and lower Preakness or perhaps from the north via an ancient Indian path from Ho Ho Kus and the Paramus area. They first settled in the lower segment of the Ramapo Valley and there, they built a log cabin church and by 1740 had constructed a stone place of worship. The junction of three roads that were little more than "trails". One from Sloomsterdam, down the "Pond hill", the other from the south, around the Indian encampments at Pompton, and the northern trail that came across the hills eastward from Ho Ho Kus, itself an Indian encampment, and also from another called "Camp Gaw", where later, a cluster of stores would spring up and became the town center of Franklin Lakes.

"The Ponds" as it was called was a simple hamlet of the church, a school house was later built on the corner and neighboring farms and their main homes and outbuildings. During the Revolutionary War, Washington's troops passed here as many as seven times in both directions. It was certainly a cross-roads of the many long before and after the war. Through the 1820's to the 1850's, not much changed. Life was a simple affair of raising crops and families, the Ponds was a basically a "closed" community, protected from the seriousness of events that would soon throw the country into Civil war. Newspapers carried by mail carriers arrived at the "Green Cottage" on the Valley road, it's proprietor was Henry "Hank" Spear who had a large prosperous farm with his son John, having a farm of his own. His younger son Jacob had died in 1847, and his widow "Aunt Kate" lived on the farm also. With sounds of War coming closer each day, "hank Spear's tavern" was most likely a local meeting house for political conversation.

By 1865, the war was over and an industrial revolution was bringing talk of a railroad line to the valley. By 1869, this became a reality north of Hank's tavern where a right of way westward saw a later extension to Pompton and Butler. Soon, prosperity that the railroad brought, moved the center of the hamlet northward to the crossing of the Valley road and the tracks.. Henry Wanamaker Bush build his general store there, and the place became known as "Bushville". A meeting was held amid the prominent town fathers and a "name" had to be decided on for a new Post office established at the railroad station. Bushville, Oak lawn, the old dutch name of De Panne' was talked about but no one could decide on a proper name so its said that, Mr. Bush offered the name "Oakland" as a temporary alternative. The town

was surely a "land of Oak trees" so the name stuck. By 1904, the town was formerly incorporated by that name.

Right→
"Never on time"!

From Aunt Annie's photos New York Susquehanna & Western train coming into Oakland Station sometime in the early 1900's or even earlier.



← Oakland Station tracks

Right→
1917 family photo on the old Homestead farm steps. Granddad Andrew, grandmother Lyda and young Dad and his Dog. Photographer unknown





A QUIET TIME ON THE RAMAPO RIVER, WINTER 1996

The ending of 1995 was not an easy time for our family as mother passed away that cold winter at our home on the Ramapo river we had lived in for scarcely a quarter of that year. It was a very cold and snowy winter that year and into 1996.

The tranquil scene above, viewed now many years later was anything but that, then. The next Spring brought floods and rain storms. But despite those hardships I recall my year's living at old "Detweillegen" with some fondness. Today, nothing remains as it was then as the Baker Company had built a high income "reserve" of millionaire homes there. Sadly, even the old house is gone as well. We had discovered it originally had been built by a grandfather of ours on my father's mother's side of the family. Samuel Bush had built the farmhouse there in the early 1700's and cultivated the same fields that later I would keep mowed with my old farm tractor. Perhaps some symbolism there of "returning to the land".

*I moved from the old river home in August of 1996, never to return again. Next stop for me was upper Wantage in Sussex County, but as we still discover, even moving to another county our family ties are found there as well. *see Spear genealogy
The end (for now) 02/16/2008.....*