

# THE “LOST” HAMLET OF WOODBURY FALLS

## Dorothy Helbing Morris

Early in the 1800s, young iron master Peter Parrott was hired by then New York State Governor Kemble and the Senior Parrott to manage an iron furnace in a small enclave called Woodbury Falls. Conditions for a successful operation of the furnace were evident; abundance of trees to cut and make charcoal, an ample supply of water power from the nearby falls, and a highway were all located nearby. Peter found housing in the nearby Pembleton boarding house. His neighbor was the Hall Line Fishing Company, owned by Alexander G. Hall. This factory was close to the “falls, a rock formation on the Woodbury Creek,” while small farms dotted the area surrounding the roadway.

Slightly north was Sweet Clover Farm, owned by the Quaker Seaman family. Although a Quaker Meeting house had been built in the area in 1801, the Seamans occasionally opened their home to Quaker meetings and also operated a school for some time. Their unusually wide, well ventilated hallway served as a perfect location for their gatherings. Further north on the flats, a hospital had been established in the Revolutionary War. The diaries of the Seaman women indicated that they had woven sheets/coverings for the hospital.

In the early 1800s, there were also a number of small farms on Smith Clove Road in Woodbury Falls, and area sometimes called called Stony Vale. Some farmers operated charcoal pits, supplying both the Woodbury and Greenwood/Arden furnaces. The Seaman diaries note that there was a constant haze in the Clove: smoke from the pits. If laundry was hung out to dry, it was covered with black soot.

School District #1 was established in the 1880s under the name of “Woodbury Falls.” The first small building was located at the corner of Trout Brook and Route 32, across from Widow VanAmbrose’s home. A larger one room building was later constructed just east on Trout Brook Road. That building stands today and is a private residence. Though it has been heavily modified, the interior walls remained intact.

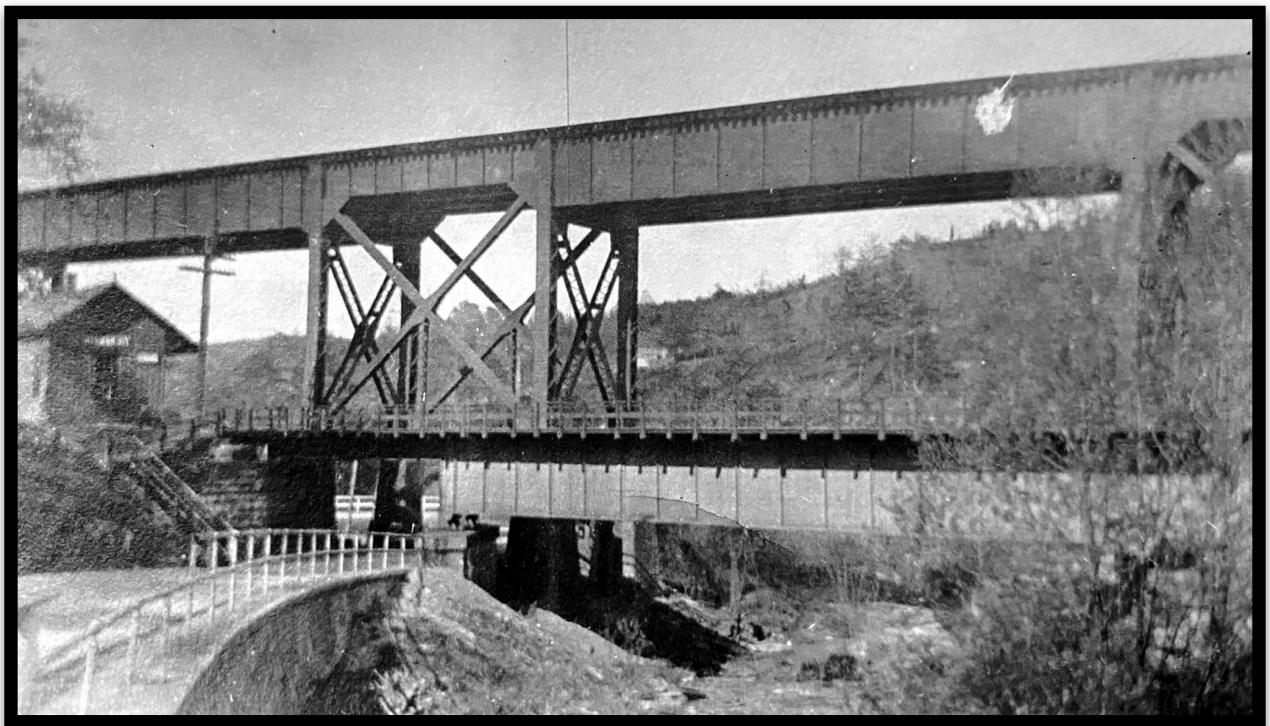
The coming of the railroad, with its scheduled stops at Woodbury Falls, Houghton Farm, and points north brought a different kind of activity to the hamlet: tourists. A post office was established in the 1800s and a small general store met the needs of many residents. VanCleft, Pembleton, Berwin, Wolf’s (next to Highland Stone), and many small farmers began to take boarders. Before dwelling in Highland Mills, the Rushmore family selected Woodbury Falls as they settled in Orange County.

Earlier, Peter Parrott found Woodbury Falls a dull and boring existence and was able to relocate and manage the Greenwood Furnace in Arden. The abuse which had befallen the area left few trees untouched by the charcoal makers. Hall Line Company moved to Railroad Avenue, Highland Mills (today’s Park Avenue). After 1886, railroad tycoon E. H. Harriman began to acquire the small farms along Smith Clove Road and absorbed these into his larger Arden Farms Dairy Company empire. The farms on Smith Clove Road were classified under the Clove Valley Farms Dairy, which had their own milk bottles labeled with the Central Valley hamlet name.

By the 1930s, the population dwindled, the school closed, and the children were bussed to the Highland Mills School. Changes in the railroad’s closing in 1937 and Route 32’s realignment also altered the character of the area. Time has passed and Woodbury Falls will likely never return as a municipality. Driving on Route 32 or the larger New York State Thruway one can make out few reminders of this once thriving community. Those who have remained here have

come to enjoy the solitude and beauty of the mountains, the streams, and the wildlife which has found its place of safety in the forest. We have silently watched as four attempts to develop the private lands have failed.

Finally, one day in 2013-2014, we awoke to the sound of the bulldozer taking down one of the old 1820's farmhouses we had become so accustomed to seeing. The Wallen, Leone, Shenya property, now known as Legacy Ridge, had been purchased by the Open Space Conservancy. Over 700 acres of prime and beautiful land in the Clove! Woodbury Falls will once again serve its community in quite a different way. Its place in history will be that it has saved a valuable piece of the Hudson Highlands for all to enjoy and treasure. Significant hiking paths will be routed through the area. It will serve as safe haven for the many animal species who once traveled throughout the valley and perhaps there will again be a forest of the many lost species of trees once native to the area. It may be a "Lost Hamlet" but it will be long remembered for its contribution to all.



Woodbury Falls Railroad Station