

# “The Minisink”

## A Chronicle of the Upper Delaware Valley

Having grown up in northwestern New Jersey and attended Boy Scout camp at Pahaquarry on the upper Delaware River, I had heard the stories of Dutch miners and the Old Mine Road as a boy and had visited the copper mines along Mine Brook on more than one occasion.

I also knew about the hurricane floods that had ravaged the Delaware Valley in 1955, remembering at least the gap torn by floodwaters in the bridge at Easton. Even something of the proposal to build a dam across the river at Tocks Island seems to have registered in my young mind, since the dam meant the demise of Camp Pahaquarry.

Little did I know then how I would later become involved in the conflict between those who cherished the upper Delaware's Minisink\* country for its history and natural beauty and those who wanted to protect downstream populations from destructive floods (and develop hydroelectric power and water supply) by building a dam. The struggle over the valley's fate would lead to my co-authoring “The Minisink,” a 200-page chronicle of its history, as well as shape my future career as a historic preservationist.

Returning to New Jersey in 1974 after graduating from college, I learned of plans by local leaders opposed to the Tocks Island Dam to commission a history of the Minisink. The proposed publication would document and publicize the resources that would be lost in damming the river. The Warren County Board of Chosen Freeholders in New Jersey and the Monroe County Commissioners in Pennsylvania agreed to undertake the study using employees hired with federal funding provided by the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA). With little more to recommend me than a college degree and an interest in history and architecture, I applied to Warren County and was hired for the position. Monroe County employed two other individuals, Pat Valence and Russ Woodling, creating a team of three CETA “writer-trainees.” Glad to have a challenging project that did not confine me to an office, I must say that the irony of using federal money to fight a federal project escaped me at the time.

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\* The geographic region of the Minisink gets its name from a derivative of Minsi, a branch of the Leni Lenape Indians who once populated the valley.

That none of us had ever written anything longer than a term paper seems not to have filled us with trepidation. Luckily, we received guidance and assistance in writing *The Minisink* from many individuals, among whom three stand out: Nancy Shukatis, chair of the Monroe County Board of Commissioners; Peter O. Wacker, chair of Rutgers University's Department of Geography; and the late Herbert Kraft, professor of archeology at Seton Hall University.

Nancy Shukatis was the driving force behind the project. With deep family roots in the Minisink, she imbued us with her strong sense of its history and natural beauty. Her conviction of our chronicle's value as a vehicle for educating the general public, as well as informing public decision makers about the important legacy to be lost if the dam were built, gave the book its compelling point of view. Without her leadership and persistence, “The Minisink” would not exist. From Pete Wacker I learned about the concept of cultural landscapes, and his seminal historical geography of the nearby Musconetcong Valley provided a framework for understanding how both the natural environment and man shaped the development and material culture of the upper Delaware Valley. Herb Kraft impressed us with his reverence for our Native American forebears and made us realize the particular importance of archeological resources in comprehending the history of the Minisink.

Like a cultural geography, the text of “The Minisink” begins with the region's natural environment and then traces man's impact on its landscape. Chapters, arranged topically and chronologically, cover such subjects as Native American and early European settlement patterns, frontier warfare and fortifications, transportation, architecture, agriculture, social institutions, industry, and recreation. It ends with a discussion of the proposed dam and its impacts.

While others must judge the value of “The Minisink” as a work of cultural history or for its impact on the decision to deauthorize the Tocks Island Dam, I hope that it will stand as a record of the valley's historical resources as they existed some 25 years ago. For me, writing “The Minisink” was a defining moment in my professional life.

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