



# Deerpark Diary

Town of Deerpark 1863 School House Museum

Town of Deerpark Historian, 25 Grange Rd., Huguenot, NY 12746

(845) 856-2702 [www.1863schoolhouse.org](http://www.1863schoolhouse.org)

June 2017

Vol. 14

No. 2

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## Oakland Valley Entrepreneurs

Oakland Valley is indeed a major character in the following story. This area, on the border of Orange and Sullivan Counties, was a natural treasure trove of marketable resources that were in demand in the mid to late 1800s. But what good was this abundance if the business owner could not access them or get them to customers? Oakland Valley again came through with the water power of the Bushkill Stream, the Neversink River, plus the avenues to market provided by the D&H Canal and the Monticello and Port Jervis Railroad. There were many owners of smaller sawmills and stone quarries dotted all over this end of the county. There was one father and son team who created a conglomerate, of sorts, by utilizing all of the resources on their one thousand or so acres and they were Osmer B. Wheeler Sr. and Jr.

According to the 1887 obituary of Mrs. Rebecca Wheeler, she and her husband Osmer had been married nearly fifty years. The vintage news article stated that as a young couple, they moved to Oakland Valley to

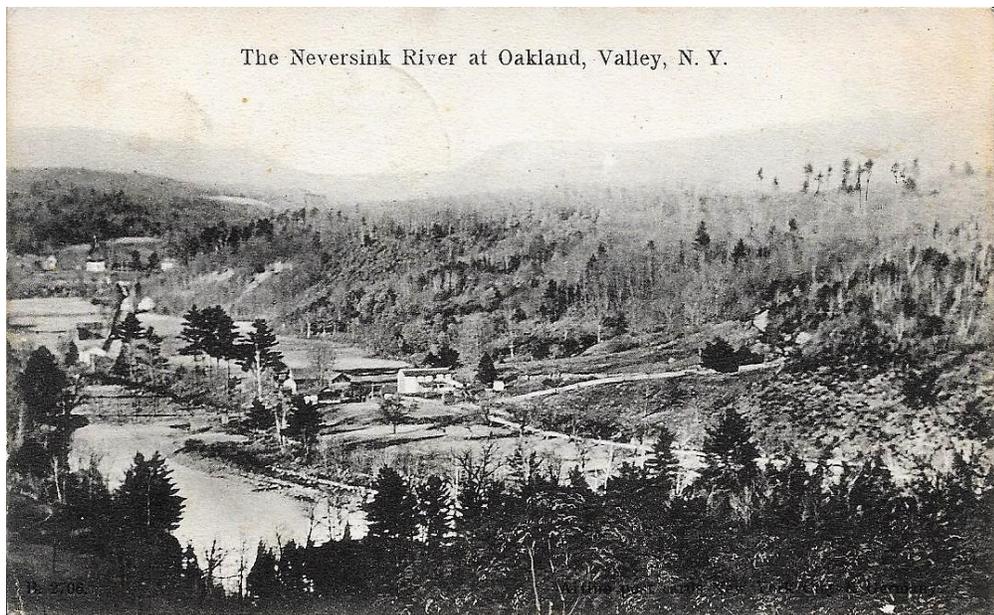
engage in the tannery business. This went on until the bark used in the tanning process ran out in 1864. They moved back to Middletown, New York. The Wheelers returned to Oakland in 1870, there to remain until his death at age 98 in 1906.

Osmer B. Wheeler was not a man to let grass grow under his feet. He was an active politician who was listed as belonging to the Whig Party back in 1855. For many years, he was a New York State Senator. O. B. was an early advocate of the Monticello and Port Jervis Railroad and was on the board of directors in 1869 when bonds were issued to build the branch connecting the two cities. That railroad launched into service in 1871 and passed right along his property.

There was a potential for a booming business dealing with multiple products including; tanning, bark chips, bluestone, flag, clay for pottery and bricks, lumber and crushed stone. They opened a boarding house, along with a general and dry goods store

which housed the telegraph and post offices.

In 1871, an extensive business movement was about to begin the construction of a tram railroad from the Wheeler stoneyard dock on the D&H Canal in Cuddebackville to the Bush Falls on the Bushkill Stream about one mile above the Village of Oakland. The grade down from Oakland to the canal was sixty feet to the mile. The loaded cars would run down to the canal by force of gravity and the empty cars would return by water power. This enterprise opened up a cheap and ready outlet for the immense amount of stone products located on both sides of the Bushkill and Neversink. The company would load freight onto their own canal boats and travel up to Rondout to the huge stoneyards there and then ship out to markets. The tram would also haul lumber, railroad ties and wood from the extensive sawing, planing and scouring mills which were run by water power from the local streams.



The Neversink River at Oakland, Valley, N. Y.

The 1870s were a mixture of good times, growth, diversity and hard times. A number of fires through the decade resulted in thousands of lost dollars. May of 1872 saw a fire from a heater that burned the tannery to the ground. Losses were \$15,000 above insurance. A fire in their boarding house brought a \$1,000 loss. Another fire destroyed their home. In 1873, a rolling mill burned at a loss of another \$1,500. Their general store and post office suffered major fire damage in 1878. Timber fires cost thousands in lost cut lumber. But O. B. Wheeler said he, "Always paid 100 cents on a dollar."

The Panic of 1873 was a financial crisis which led to a national and worldwide depression from 1873 – 1879. Wheeler kept his business open and employed thirty men cutting railroad wood for future use, just to keep men working. Despite the hard times and disaster, which might have driven a good many men to drink, O. B. Wheeler delivered lectures on the subject of temperance at local churches.

O.B. Wheeler Jr. was in business right along with his father. Jr. ran the general store and post office. To further his education, he and his wife moved to Denver, Colorado in 1879, where he accepted a position in the mining company's office. During his stay O. B. Jr. took a full course at the Denver School of Mines to become an assayer. He returned back east

with a certificate and a greater knowledge of minerals.

The mineral deposits of Oakland included abundant sand and clay which opened the door for building a pottery factory. Another fire struck, January 1882, in the pottery drying room, but damage was limited by the extraordinary efforts of the workmen. The loss was covered by insurance from the L. E. Elston & Son Insurance Company of Port Jervis.

In 1882, the local newspapers were buzzing about the fact that Oakland Valley held an unlimited supply of high quality feldspar. O. B. Jr.'s education was paying off. Professor J. Edgar Dixon of Worcester, Massachusetts and local reporters drove to the site to examine the deposits. Dixon stated that feldspar was the most common material found except for the clay that was used in the pottery factory. Dixon was convinced the feldspar was of superior quality. He felt the quality was more valuable than any found except for China where fine quality China-ware got its name. Additionally, the mineral was not to be found in the usual ledge formation, but was actually in the boulder type which is far easier to access than to drill to blast to it. He said the drift of feldspathic stone extended down the entire Neversink Valley almost to Port Jervis.

Samples were brought to Port Jervis and subjected to the white heat of the Brox and Buckley glass

factory. The rock was heated for a short time and then plunged into water where it crumbled, showing it could be reduced to powder easily. The specimens which were heated for forty-five minutes showed fine glazing properties. Samples were sent to pottery factories and they received very high praise for the quality of the white-granite ware produced. The Wheelers had a profitable business waiting as soon as they were fully established.

With all of this blue stone quarrying and digging for clay and minerals, the natural by-product would be great piles of waste stone. Wheeler proposed to Port Jervis that he would ship carloads of this waste stone to Port Jervis by rail so they could crush the stone and cover the streets of the

**WANTED!**  
**100 Quarrymen TO LOCATE IN**  
**Oakland Valley, Sul. Co., N.Y.**

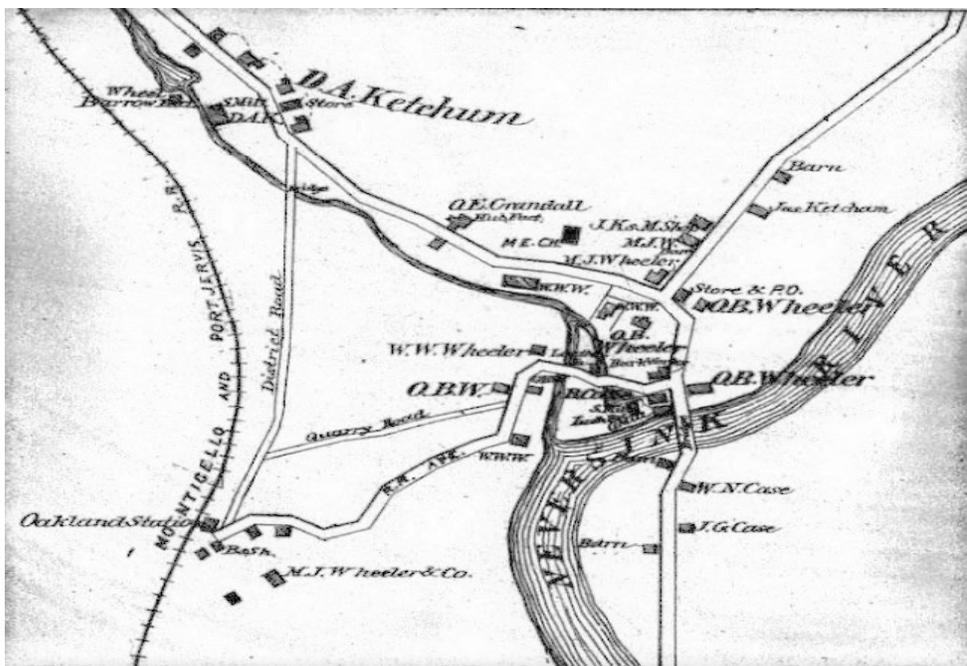
On line Port Jervis & Monticello R. R., to develop Stone Quarries on the lands of North River & Oakland Blue Stone Co., formerly Wheeler Quarries. Good Quarries, short route and convenient docks. All quarried stone bought and cash paid for same. For further particulars inquire of

**Dunn & Co., Foot of 68th St., E. River, N.Y. City**  
Or J. W. Lane, Oakland Valley, Sullivan County, N. Y.  
 Or Port Jervis & Monticello R. R., Port Jervis, N. Y.

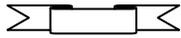
city. He was willing to give the stone away. City Fathers purchased a stone crusher to be placed along the tracks so that the stone could be off-loaded into the crusher and the end product could pave the streets. The world has not changed. Democratic councilman felt the crusher was a huge-waste of money spent by Republicans who wanted to do nothing more than to spend tax payer dollars.

Over time parts of the business were sold off to men hoping to revive the quarries and lumbering. Times were changing and these men sold to others as they struggled to make a go of it. O. B. Wheeler Jr. found himself in North Carolina in charge of the vast clay works owned by the Vanderbilts. The factories produced millions of bricks and fancy roof tiles. O.B. Jr. became the first mayor of the new city of Biltmore, near Asheville.

Osmer B. Wheeler's home was sold for \$2,400 in January of 1907, just a few months after his death. The new owner Max Weiss had plans to do the



home over and turn it into a boarding house. With the passage of time and the growth of trees and brush, one will have a hard time finding evidence of that most industrious age in Oakland Valley history.



## “Close Encounters with Birds of Prey”



On Sunday, June 11, 2017 at 3PM, The Deerpark Museum is hosting a program presented by The Delaware Valley Raptor Center. DVRC Director Bill Streeter and Associate Director Jan Lucciola have decades of experience in the rehabilitation and care of injured birds of prey including owls, eagles, hawks, falcons and kestrels. Their mission is to enable these birds to return to the wild, no longer needing humans to help them survive.

Some birds, due to their injuries, must remain at the facility. These birds become an important teaching element. The goal of the presentation for Bill is to allow the audience to “experience the majesty” of these birds and for the public to take away with them a better understanding, respect and appreciation for these birds and their vital importance to our ecology. Visit their website at [www.dvronline.org](http://www.dvronline.org) for more details.

Please join us for the program at The Neversink Valley Grange on 35 Grange Rd., in Huguenot next to the 1863 School House Museum.  
Free Refreshments



## Chief Cahoonzie

The William G. Pomeroy Foundation in partnership with the New York Folklore Society launched a grant program to provide cultural tourism and commemorate legends and lore as part of New York’s history. Folklore draws attention to what is unique about our community. Over time the stories that are passed from person to person are modified and changed but they do contain a kind of historical truth. On May 21, 2017, Deerpark’s newest Legends and Lore Marker was dedicated, thanks to the generous grant from the Pomeroy Foundation. This is our second such marker honoring a local legend.

The life of Chief Cahoonzie is shrouded in myth and lore. The hamlet of Cahoonzie, one of seven in the Town of Deerpark, was named for this man. Tradition states that Cahoonzie was a member of a small tribe of Delaware called the Cahoonshees. When he was a boy, he was captured and taken to England. There he was paraded around in absurd native costume. However, the English chose to educate Cahoonzie, who mastered the language and a fair bit of arts and sciences. His keepers were preparing to send him back to his homeland as an interpreter and agent. Upon his arrival in Manhattan, he immediately set out for home, which is the area we call Cahoonzie today.

However, he was deeply saddened by what he found upon his return. The settlers had greatly increased in number and were pushing his people out until they left the area altogether. He chose to remain at his boyhood home and live out the rest of his life in a small cabin on the Shinglekill. Cahoonzie was a wise and proud man who stood seven feet tall and had a head of snow white hair.

Much of what we know about Chief Cahoonzie was collected and written down by local 19th century attorney and author, James Allerton, in his book entitled “Hawks Nest or the Last of the Cahoonshees.” As a boy, he listened to stories about Cahoonzie from local oldtimers, who were alive at the time of Cahoonzie’s first burial. Joseph Wilson was one of these men. From the description of the burial site, Allerton had the body exhumed. A skeleton of extraordinary length was found and a grand reburial ceremony at a new location was convened with much fanfare. Allerton said, “May it be said of us as it is said of Cahoonzie, he died a good man.”

The Historian’s Office wishes to thank Ed Hughes, Highway Superintendent and his staff for all of the help they provide to us throughout the year, especially the installation and care of Deerpark’s historic markers.



And, a special thank you to Joan Applegate for allowing us to post this marker on her property. She is now Cahoonzie’s Guardian Angel!

Lynn M. Burns Town Historian

Article from the *Tri-State Union*,  
April 12, 1900

**Big Store of Ice**  
**Jacob Bauer Has 15,000 Tons**  
**Ready for Delivery**  
**To Paterson Parties – Metropolitan**  
**Demand for the local supply**  
**Jacob Bauer's Handsome Ice Profit**

“The large force of men who have been at work for the last two weeks past cutting and storing ice for Jacob Bauer in his ponds in upper Cahoonzie completed their work Saturday.

“The two big ice houses having the capacity of 1,200 and 1,500 tons respectively have been filled and 11,500 tons have been stacked on the ground covered with straw and hay and substantial board structures built around them so as to protect the ice from the sun's rays.

“Altogether Mr. Bauer has 15,000 tons ready for delivery, all of it contracted by Paterson parties. At the prevailing rate of \$2 at ton this will sell for \$30,000. Mr. Bauer does not state the price called for by his contract, but as his ice is of superior quality, being of pure spring water, the price is certainly not below the prevailing rate. The ice is between 12 and 14 inches thick.

“Mr. Bauer estimates that 15 teams will be kept at work until November hauling ice to the Sparrowbush switch for delivery on board Erie cars.

“Owing to the precautions taken to protect the stacks there will be little loss from melting. Persons with a taste for arithmetic can figure out Mr. Bauer's profits on this deal by subtracting the cost of cutting, storing and hauling from the estimated purchase price of his store of ice.”

*Historian's note: Jacob Bauer was the owner of a large boarding house called the Cahoonzie Park Inn. This was in the vicinity of where Chief Cahoonzie was buried. Jacob Bauer later owned the Neubauer Inn in Port Jervis.*



**Cahoonzie Park Inn**



**Grange Memorabilia**

On Sunday, September 17, 2017, the Town of Deerpark Museum will hold our annual “Open House,” but a little differently this year. We will be celebrating along with the Sparrowbush Engine Company's 100th Anniversary at their firehouse grounds. This promises to be quite a day.

Our museum will also be celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Grange Movement, in an effort to honor the importance of farming in Deerpark. As you know, we have been working very hard to bring back to life the Neversink Valley Grange Building on 35 Grange Rd. in Huguenot as an active community center. We are asking members of the community to snuffle around in your “home archives” and look for old photos and memorabilia of the Grange and past events so that we might showcase the building's history and importance to the community.

Please contact us at the Historian's Office at 856-2702 or 856-4515. Thank You!

**Rusty Reminders**

Here are a couple of rusty landmarks about the town. Do you recognize them and their location?

