



# Deerpark Diary

Town of Deerpark 1863 Huguenot School House

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## Introduction

In 1835 the New York State Engineer's report describes in detail the plan to utilize the following route for the Erie Railroad. The railroad is shown as passing through Otisville, bending sharply south and descending into the Neversink Valley. At a later date the Port Jervis & Monticello Railway used this prescribed route through the Neversink Valley when they built their spur connecting Monticello to Port Jervis.

"When a team of engineers was hired by the Erie to review the 1835 State survey they did not agree on this part of the route. Their report stated 'It is proposed, under these circumstances, instead of adopting an inclined plan for descending from the Shawangunk, to obtain by means of a tunnel of 900 yards, such a reduction of the elevation to be overcome...' This document reveals that the State of New York paid for a survey which benefited



*Otisville Tunnel—Western Portal*  
a private enterprise, the Erie." \*

It is interesting that a tunnel had been proposed as early as 1835. The events in this issue took place during 1847, with the building of the Otisville tunnel and the laying of the tracks through the Black Rock Cut. The deadline for the completion of the railroad into Port Jervis was January 1, 1848.

This section was difficult to construct and many did not think that it would be completed before the prescribed deadline. The train did pull into Port Jervis just before midnight on Dec. 31st.

\* Source: "Erie Survey—1835" Erie Railroad Magazine, May, 1951

## "The Story of Erie" by E. H. Mott

"During 1847, the thirteen miles of railroad between the Sha-

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wangunk Summit and Port Jervis were completed. President Loder had divided the road into sections, for the completion of which he had fixed certain dates, the finishing of the work on such dates being provided for in the contracts, a failure being attended with cost to the contractor. Thus, December 31, 1847, was the day on which the locomotive was to enter Port Jervis. The extraordinary character of the work to be done may be imagined from a brief description of some of it. At the summit of the mountain, near Otisville, was a rock cut upwards of fifty feet deep in the deepest place, and extending with some interruption over a length of 2,500 feet. The contractor for this work was Thomas King. A little more than a mile beyond was a heavy embankment, to be supported on the lower side by a retaining wall more than fifty feet high, and several hundred feet in length. This was followed immediately by a heavy thorough cut in the rock, 1,000 feet long and thirty feet deep. Half a mile further on was another enormous embankment to be supported on the lower side by a wall fifty feet high. These sections were in the hands of Charles Story. At Shin Hollow, about half way between Otisville and Port Jervis, was a cut upwards of three-fourths of a mile long and more than forty feet deep, in the contract of Charnichael & Strana-

han. Beyond that was an embankment upwards of fifty feet high, and 1,500 feet long. Immediately adjacent to this embankment was another enormous thorough cut in rock upwards of fifty feet in depth.

“In those early days of railroad building such an undertaking as this cutting of a roadway along the rocky side of that wild mountain pass was something that required more courage, endurance, and perseverance than a work many times as formidable would in these days of advanced constructive science; but the work was pushed forward with all possible facility by the contractors, under the persistent spurring of Silas Seymour, the Construction Engineer.

“The rails that were to be put down from Otisville west were the first American t-rails for which any actual order for extensive use of them had ever been given. Up to that time England supplied this country with rails. These for the Erie were rolled at the Lakawanna Iron Works, in the Wyoming Valley, PA, and were delivered to the Company by means of the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company ...”

*\*The following information was presented at the official opening of the railroad on Thursday, January 6, 1848. (editor's note)*

“President Loder presented a memorandum of interesting statistics prepared by Mr. Silas Seymour, Superintending Engineer: in the construction of the road from Otisville to Port Jervis, a distance of thirteen miles; 317,000 pounds of powder had been consumed; 210,000 cubic yards of solid rock and 730,000 of earth excavated; 14,000 yards of sloping wall constructed; 300,000 days labor bestowed upon it by 3,000 laborers; and 30,000 days' labor by horses...The section between Otisville and Port Jervis has been mainly constructed since June last. The president having determined to complete the work by the first of January, 3,000 laborers were sent over their road gratuitously.

“The contractors, Carmichael and Stranahan, C. Story, Thomas King, deserve credit for the energy and enterprise with which they have fulfilled their contracts. The grading between Otisville and Port Jervis cost about \$30,000 a mile.”



Erie Railroad crossing over the Delaware and Hudson Canal

## The Shin Hollow War

The following excerpts about the Shin Hollow War are from an article published in a periodical *The Railroad Trainman*, circa 1890. Writings of that time included extraneous descriptions based on the author's view of the event. These have been eliminated through the use of ellipses. If you are interested in the entire article as it was written, a copy is available from Norma Schadt, Town of Deerpark Historian, 1863 Huguenot Schoolhouse, PO Box 621, Huguenot, NY 12746.

“President Loder being anxious to have the road through to Port Jervis by January 1, 1848, offered the contractors handsome bonuses to hasten the work. The laborers newly arrived in this country, were mostly known as “Wild Irishmen”, and had the factional hatreds and belligerent traditions of their native land. It happened that two bitterly opposed factions, the Far-downers and the Corkonians were represented among these laborers. This was ...the situation on the section of the work of which Shin Hollow was the center.

“Shin Hollow was a stretch of flat land lying between the western face of the mountain range and the foothills, four miles east of Port Jervis...

“In searching for the impelling cause of the Shin Hollow War, fifty years after it occurred,... the historian is confronted with the testimony of tradition, and the uncertain memory of a few who were among those living in the locality when the riot occurred...

“The pay of railroad labor-



Black Rock Cut

ers on the Shawangunk Mountain's section of the New York and Erie Railroad had been fixed at seventy-five cents a day...Corkonians accepted that pay...Later, Far-downers...rebelled at seventy-five cents a day...Another version is that the trouble began with the boarding-houses at Shin Hollow "skimping" the men in their rations, and with the contractors' clerks cheating them...Still another account fixes the responsibility on the hiring of the Germans...But the weight of evidence is that the number of Far-downers became much greater than that of the Corkonians, and that...they would not be true to their traditions if they did not rise up and break an occasional Corkonian head...

"About the middle of January, 1847, the Far-downers began to be aggressive. Fights... became a daily and nightly occurrence..Saturday, January 30th a large body of Far-downers.. marching to a section of Carmichael & Stranahan's contract, attacked the Corkonians with clubs and stones, wounding several severely, and compelling the gang to throw away their tools and take an oath that they would leave the work. The following Monday a

still stronger force of ...Far-downers,..armed with guns, ..proceeded to another part of Charmichael & Stranahan's section, surrounded the laborers, fired a volley over their heads, and declared that they would riddle them with shot if they did not quit work. The Corkonians threw down their tools. Their foes then drove them before them to Shin Hollow, where they forced the contractors' agent to pay the men off and discharge them. ...

"After dealing with that gang of Corkonians, the triumphant Far-downers marched, with fierce yells and dire threats,... where the Germans were employed...The Germans,...received the confident Irish with such vigor and determination that the latter were soon flying from the field...

"The raids of the Far-downers created a panic among the other laborers and work was almost suspended along the mountain. The Germans were the only ones that did not lose a day. The Irishmen who had been driven from their jobs still loitered about Shin Hollow... rumor had spread that the Corkonians had resolved to return to work. ...

"On the evening, February 3rd, the Corkonians at Shin Hol-

low had climbed to their bunks in the boarding-house lofts..stores and shanties were closed for the night...

"At midnight, the Far-downers, one hundred strong, and armed, marched into the place, divided their forces, and proceeded half to one boarding-house and half to another...The Corkonians... made a weak resistance to the attack. At O'Brien's boarding-house, where most of the men were in the lofts, hastily pulled up the ladders by which they climbed to their bunks...The Far-downers swarmed into the place and beat those to be got at. The men in the lofts refused to come down...the attacking party hunted up axes and chopped down the posts that supported the lofts and brought the latter and their frightened occupants crashing into a heap on the floor. After hammering the Corkonians until there were few unbroken heads..., the rioters made their victims swear, at the gun's muzzle, that they would quit ...

"A similar scene was enacted at the other boarding-house...One Corkonian, who was especially obnoxious to the Far-downers, was shoved into a big Dutch oven, and left there by his captors...

"Having dealt ...with their Irish Fellow-citizens, there was a rush to the German quarter of Shin Hollow. Race hatred was augmented by the recollection of the victory the Germans had won over the Irish a few days before...the latter dashed to a new attack upon the Germans...But the Germans...suspecting the possibility of such an outbreak, were prepared..They had a leader named Wisler. He had obtained guns and ammunition

from Port Jervis, Otisville, and Middletown. ...They were drawn up in a line in the darkness...ready for action when the wild Irish detachment came whooping and yelling to the assault. The Irish were within a few yards of the German quarter, when...a streak of fire punctured the darkness, (then.. another streak of fire showed them a momentary gleam of determined Teutonic faces). The Irish forces broke and fled toward the woods. The Germans pursued them and captured one prisoner...

“The most intense excitement prevailed at Shin Hollow the rest of the night. The Far-downers bombarded the place from the woods...The contractors concluded that it was time to take some action toward putting an end to the troubles...A message (*was dispatched*) to Sheriff Welling, at Goshen...The sheriff with a posse arrived at Shin Hollow during the next forenoon, but being unable to quell the riot and arrest any of the rioters, he called on the Deerpark Militia to aid him...Capt. Peter Swartwout summoned his company, and led it to the scene of the Shin Hollow War...



*Peter D. Swartwout*

“There were twenty-five or thirty men in the company... As the company approached



*Sketch of Erie train crossing the wooden trestle over the Neversink River, built in 1847*

the scene of the disturbance they were divided into squads by Capt. Swartwout, for the purpose of reconnoitering and investigating the shanties that were scattered about in the woods...

“The Shin Hollow combatants, frightened at the advance of this formidable army of military... shut themselves up in such shanties as they could get into, or fled to the woods. The Deerpark Volunteers...scoured the locality and took many prisoners. These..were marched to the office of the paymaster of the contractors, where they were paid off and promptly discharged, and warned to leave the neighborhood. For fear that they would not leave, and that more trouble would ensue, two of the Deerpark Company, Samuel Smith and “Case” Caskey, were left on the grounds with a cannon to maintain the peace, and the remainder of the company returned home...Smith, his comrade, and cannon remained a week or so at Shin Hollow, when, it being apparent that the trouble was over, they returned home.

“If the rioters had only known it, though,” says High Private Everitt, in recalling the incidents of the war, “they could have had a great deal of fun with

that battery of artillery, for neither Smith nor Caskey knew any more about loading or firing a cannon than if he had never seen one.”...

“Some of the prisoners taken were turned over to the Sheriff, who escorted them to Goshen, where they were given a hearing and heavily fined. They were then taken back to Shin Hollow, and the contractors settled with them and discharged them.

“This did not entirely quell the riotous spirit of the Irish. A squad of militia was kept on the grounds for nearly a month, by which time the ringleaders were found out, summarily discharged and warned out of the region. These guards were from Middletown or Goshen. They had been transported on a (*rail-road*) car run from Otisville. The car stopped about a mile from the scene of hostilities and unloaded the “troops”...peace was gradually restored, and the Shin Hollow War passed down into history as an engagement in which much blood was shed, but no lives were positively known to have been lost, although legend insists that the Germans killed three of the Irish in that night attack, and buried them in the woods.”