



Old Calno School<sup>1</sup>

## **Life and Death on the Old Mine Road**

### **The consequences of the failed Tocks Island Dam Project**

By James Alexander Jr. Updated ©September 2021

This article is the first part of what has evolved into a major review of this government project which had unintended and painful results, now facing new challenges. For the full set of information, [go here](#).

*Here is a land which many who live in New Jersey have never seen and in which as many more do not believe.... It is a land of crags and crowding precipices of the Kittatinny Ridge, of winding roads that were the paths of the Indians, of quiet and seldom-seen mountain lakes, of noisy brooks and flashing waterfalls, of hundred-year and even older houses at every turn.... Now and then, in spite of the improvements that have come even to the Old Mine Road, there is no more than a shelf in the side of the mountain.... Here, indeed, is a country that provides ... a setting in which anything can happen.<sup>2</sup>*

## **Pahaquarry and the Tocks Island Dam**

“We just got a call from the State House. You need to get up to Pahaquarry Township tomorrow evening.” That fall day back in the early seventies, managing a staff of wonderfully talented people providing management consulting services to New Jersey’s 567 municipalities and 21 counties, I asked two questions: “What’s up, and where is it?”

The answer was short: “Senator Dumont asked us to send somebody. The town’s in trouble. There’s a meeting at the old Calno School somewhere above the Delaware Water Gap, along the Old Mine Road in Warren County. Get a map and offer our assistance!”

Senator Wayne Dumont, who eventually served thirty years in the state legislature and who had previously run for Governor, became known as the Dean of the Senate by virtue of his tenure, and the fledgling State Department of Community Affairs wanted to extend every courtesy.

So late afternoon the next day, I got in the State car with a trusted colleague (TC), and headed north out of Trenton. I had asked him to join for two reasons: he was a skilled field person who handled many small municipalities, and he knew how to get around in the wilds of northwest Jersey. After we got out of the traffic leaving Trenton and worked north, we began seeing foothills and then small mountains. Urban New Jersey was behind us, and we were entering a different world.

TC had another attribute, which was that he knew the decent places to eat while on the road, so somewhere along Route 46, he pointed to a small diner and said: “Let’s pull in here.” An old-time diner it was. Customers, who arrived in battered pickup trucks and old cars, knew the waitress, and she put in their orders without asking. Soon, massive platters of meat loaf, succotash, and mashed potatoes with a puddle of gravy were receiving our attention, followed by strong coffee and a slab of pumpkin pie. A State trooper grabbed a stool at the other end of the counter, soon followed by another. In that part of the state many towns relied on the State Police, who were stretched pretty thin, but they were up to the job. As they quietly compared notes over their coffee before resuming patrol, TC and I got back in the car in the deepening dusk, heading northwest, making our plans for the meeting ahead that we now definitely felt was in a different place.

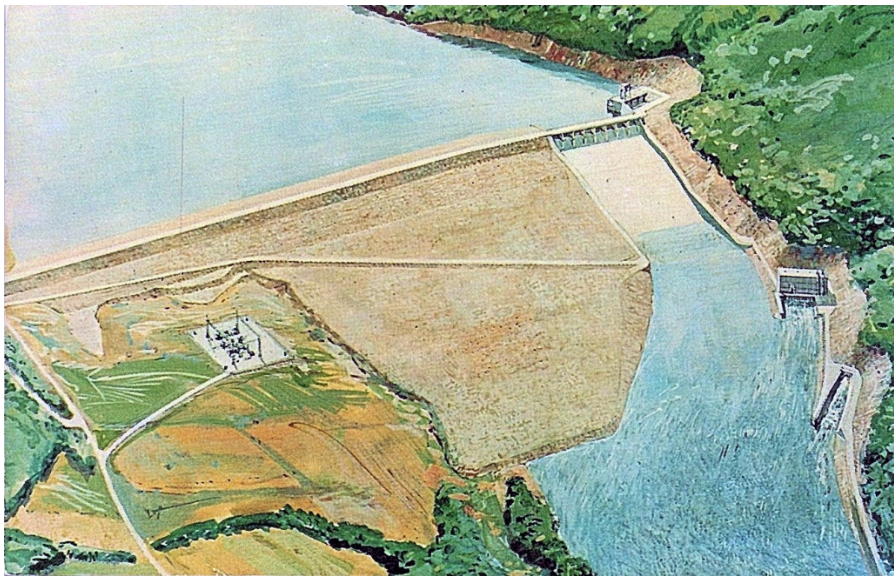
Pahaquarry Township, about 20 square miles in area, had been incorporated in 1824. Part of the Minisink Valley created in the Ice Age, it ran about nine miles along the Delaware River above the Delaware Water Gap, with much of its roughly two-mile width being a hilly rise to the crest of the Kittatinny Mountains.<sup>3</sup> The mountain chain had largely isolated it from the pressures of the eastern cities. While New Jersey was the scene of important American Revolution battles, the Pahaquarry area of the state had little involvement. At the beginning of the 19th century, the region was characterized as “an area of small farms and villages touched more by the passing seasons than great events.”<sup>4</sup>

In fact, a history of the northwest part of the state in 1881 noted that Pahaquarry Township had sometimes been referred to as “the State of Pahaquarry,” owing to its isolation.<sup>5</sup> Many of the residents over the generations descended from the early Dutch settlers, of the Van Campen, Shoemaker, Depue, Decker and Ribble families.<sup>6</sup> It had eked out a quiet New England-like existence, mostly small farms, several small sawmills, some abandoned copper and mineral mines, scattered rustic summer homes, and several camp areas. The Appalachian Trail ran through it. The pristine glacial lake Sunfish Pond lay on the crest of the mountain range. Pahaquarry’s name came from the Lenape Indians: “the place between the mountains beside the waters.”

Well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, much of the Old Mine Road had remained unpaved, adding to the sense of isolation, especially in winter. As one resident was to recall decades later, “the roads were very frequently unplowed, the chance of a fire engine showing up at your house was about 40 minutes away, ditto an ambulance - particularly when the road over the mountain towards Blairstown was sheer ice for much of the winter.

In the winter of 1937, when Pahaquarry resident Elizabeth Hamilton needed an emergency appendectomy, it was decided that the trip down the icy, bumpy Old Mine Road would have been hazardous for her condition. Alternative arrangements were thus made: her husband paddled her across the Delaware River to Pennsylvania. There she was loaded on to a waiting ambulance that whisked her down to the hospital in Stroudsburg. Something right out of an earlier time even then.<sup>7</sup>

**The river was the problem that resulted in our visit that night.** Hurricane Diane of 1955 had inflicted horrendous flooding, with deaths and millions of dollars in damage. While the most publicized damage was downstream from Pahaquarry, a small community in its southern end, known as Brotzmanville, was largely wiped out.<sup>8</sup> In response, the Army Corps of Engineers had resurrected the old idea of building a huge earthen dam at Tocks Island just above the Delaware Water Gap at Pahaquarry<sup>9</sup> to create a 37-mile lake between New Jersey and Pennsylvania, about a mile wide. The intent was to protect the increasingly built-up downstream areas from flooding, as well as stabilize the water supplies of New York City and Philadelphia. Other touted benefits included recreation, supporting nuclear generating plants downstream, and jobs creation. With Congressional approval, the Federal government undertook a massive program resulting in 72,000 acres of land being acquired in both states, much by eminent domain over the protests of residents and others. One of the first parcels to be condemned was in Pahaquarry in June 1967.<sup>10</sup> In a sad but largely forgotten episode in our history, some 15,000 Americans were displaced in both states. Buildings were bulldozed, many residents evicted.<sup>11</sup>



*Tocks Island Dam Rendering. Actual location south of Tocks Island, New Jersey side on right<sup>12</sup>.*

As late as 1963, author John Cunningham had captured the feel of the area when he wrote: “Mystery and isolation still lie heavily on Pahaquarry Township, least settled of New Jersey’s municipalities. Rare is the visitor, particularly when winter closes its icy grip....”<sup>13</sup> In fact, when a history of the Old Mine Road had been

written in 1909, it was filled with tales of Indian battles, mysteries about who originally opened the road, and how the mines had been operated.<sup>14</sup> While it likely started out as a series of Indian trails, at the time of the road's opening, the area was on the frontier, and in many ways it had stayed that way. It is regarded as one of the oldest roads in the United States still in existence. Pahaquarry's population peaked at 465 in 1860, followed by a relentless decline. By the 1970s, much of its southern part was already part of the Worthington State Forest.

Earlier, in 1942, State defense officials had sent form letters to all of New Jersey's towns, asking what they planned to do in case of a war emergency. Finally, a Pahaquarry official replied: "We have no school, no police, and a permanent blackout. If the enemy wants to waste ammunition this is a swell place to do it. I have the only telephone in the neighborhood, and if you will give us a ring when you get a warning, I'll saddle my horse and warn the natives."<sup>15</sup>

By the early seventies, with hardly any private property left in Pahaquarry, the idea of building the dam had been successfully blocked by ardent environmentalists, local anger, and changing financial priorities.<sup>16</sup> Now the National Park Service was tasked with administering the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area on the acquired land.

The smallest of stores was a good 25-minute ride away, when the roads were clear to allow the drive; other services were farther removed. One resident said: "It takes an attitude of self-reliance to live here. We're living on what was a frontier.... If my water freezes, I have to haul water. If the fuel oil company can't get its truck over the mountain, I have to haul fuel oil. It becomes tedious."<sup>17</sup>

Those few residents who were allowed to remain were on special Federal leases. There was no significant property tax base left to provide municipal revenues to Pahaquarry, but the roads had to be maintained, plowed in winter, and several children sent to public schools in another town. With only some 71 residents in 1970, and dropping rapidly, it was barely able to fill the prescribed government offices and comply with the requirements of municipal operation. The township was using the old Calno School as its municipal building, which was closed most of the time.<sup>18</sup>

Michael Mordkin, who had served as mayor of Pahaquarry for twenty-five years, had captured Pahaquarry's dilemma when he told a New York Times reporter in

1972: "We are a frozen township, we're finished."<sup>19</sup> Another resident, Don Van Hagen who was to succeed Mordkin as Mayor, operated the Old Copper Mine Inn, the last business in town. He complained that "The government has bought up all the land in the valley and it is ruined as a place to live in. I'm fighting condemnation proceedings, but know I'll lose in the end."<sup>20</sup>

His wife Mildred lamented that "the community is a very, very lonely place. All of our friends and neighbors are gone and here we are stranded in the middle of nowhere. But we have to stay, our livelihood is here."<sup>21</sup>

*The town needed to die, but it didn't know how to, and really didn't want to. That's why we were there.* The Attorney General had advised that there was no statutory method for a town to simply go out of business. Every inch of land in New Jersey is required to be in an incorporated municipal government entity. For Pahaquarry to stop functioning governmentally, an adjacent town would have to agree to take it in, but why would one want to assume the responsibilities with no property tax income?

As we left the main highway, almost missing the last exit in New Jersey, we came upon the Old Mine Road. Dating back to the earliest European settlers, it ran for some forty miles in New Jersey, and then on to Kingston, NY. Two narrow lanes, just one at the southern end, poorly maintained, no signs, no lights. It seemed like we drove forever.

Looking at a map today, we drove less than ten miles, but creeping along in the darkness, with a darkened slope down to the Delaware on the left and the rising land on the right, and spooky roadside shapes, every shadow gave fear of collision with some animal or leaving the road. It was white-knuckle driving, requiring intense focus on the road ahead. We had hoped to encounter signs and a lighted school, but this was not the case.

Suddenly, TC spoke out: "I think we just passed it! Back up!"

## **The Meeting and What Followed**





*Calno School in earlier times.<sup>22</sup>*

I hit the brakes, and backed up slowly. There wasn't a light to be seen, but there in the intermittent moonlight was indeed what looked like an old one-room schoolhouse, set back from the Old Mine Road. With not a soul around, we pulled up on the grass and waited. No legible sign, but we assumed it was the Calno School, built in the 1890s. Although we could not see it, behind the school was a stretch of fertile bottomland known as the Pahaquarry Flat, leading down to the Delaware River.

Eventually, a pickup truck appeared out of the darkness, then another and another. One guy got out, and with flashlight in hand, went up to the front door. "I'll turn the lights on and get the heat up." A minute later he emerged in the darkness, muttering that the fuse had blown again. A voice from another truck announced that he had some spares at home, and he'd be right back with them. While waiting, what appeared in the gloom to be a worn white Cadillac pulled up, and Senator Wayne Dumont emerged, greeting people: "How's your mother's arthritis?" and "I heard you had some trouble with your fence." He knew his constituents and they knew him!

Inside, it looked very much like an old school. One room, chalkboard on one wall. Worn. Newer additions included several battered filing cabinets, tables, an old voting booth and piano in one corner. Handful of chairs. All the windows were on the south side, a change made decades earlier when the windows on the north side were added to those on the south side for energy purposes, well before energy was a national priority.

What ensued was like a very small New England town meeting. It started with the Senator announcing that he had told “the people down in Trenton that we need help, and these representatives from the Department of Community Affairs were sent up to provide us with some answers.” He spoke of Trenton as if it were the capital of a foreign power he was ambassador to. First, we asked some questions, immediately sensing that this was not a simple problem. We proceeded to explain the legal story, that a town could not just go out of business, nor could it foist itself on a neighboring town without its agreement. In a deferential voice, I advised the gathering how fortunate they were to have such a respected senator and that if he could craft some helpful legislation, the Department of Community Affairs would be fully supportive of their efforts.

Clearly, the meeting was also about the anger of the remaining people, about how they and their heritage had been treated. They had not wanted to lose their homes and farms. Even as life tenants now of the Federal government, they did not want to lose their way of life, under water or not. That night, we did not know the full story.

Things were not to get better. A federal program allowed renting out some Federally-owned homes, in many cases to “hippies from the city,” some of whom defaulted on their rental obligations or had squatted in the first instance. Pahaquarry was to encounter some of these activities. On an area near the Delaware known as the Harry’s Farm site, a “Hippie Community” had rented part of a field which they named “Cloud Nine,” which hampered archaeological excavation efforts in 1970.<sup>23</sup>

Many of the remaining residents, fearful of having their leases terminated if they spoke out, kept their resentment to themselves, but one woman in 1972 said: “We had a nice community, but it’s awful now.... The Rangers don’t seem to care what happens here, people cut down trees and the hippies from across the river run all over the place.”<sup>24</sup>



In 1974, Frank Blasi, whose closest neighbor was two miles away from the Federally-owned farm he rented, lamented that “The place is full of hippies. Why, they're coming in down the glen, swimming naked and running around. You got to lock up everything. Didn't have to do that before.” A relative newcomer himself, he and his wife had moved to Pahaquarry thirty-three years earlier, but the diminished population required him to serve as president of the school board that had no students and no school, while his wife served as school board treasurer and custodian of funds. In earlier years, they had rented rooms to the occasional hunter, but that too had dropped off.<sup>25</sup>



*Frank and Viola Blasi, farmers and township officials, in 1974.*

Another resident, Donald von Hagen, who served as mayor before his death, observed that the park rangers “had a rough time dislodging them” from Pahaquarry.<sup>26</sup> Across the river in Pennsylvania, an infamous day in 1974 saw ninety US Marshalls descend on such squatters, with their forcible removal immediately followed by the bulldozing of the buildings, historical or not, to prevent reoccupancy.<sup>27</sup>

The Philadelphia Inquirer reflected widespread rage:

*The performance of the U. S. Justice Department and its U. S. Marshals Office was appalling, insensitive, stupid, and intolerable. It is a picture of staggering armed power, a jackbooted dawn raider, a force that throws a blanket-bundled newborn—and helpless, if wrongheaded, adults—into the February cold.*<sup>28</sup>

Word and feelings spread fast in the valley, on both sides of the river, and lasted long.

Soon, the meeting in the old schoolhouse ended, and we were back in the car on the Old Mine Road, headed south for Trenton, uncertain of the town's future, unsure what to do. The drive back was easier, but not happier.

Other than routine contacts, nothing much further was heard for several decades. Pahaquarry struggled along, and no legislation emerged. It was only later that it

dawned on me that the good Senator was in a no-win situation. He desperately wanted to help his Pahaquarry friends, but he had more constituents in the adjoining towns that wanted nothing to do with it, hence the dilemma that led to inferring responsibility for the solution to “the people down in Trenton.” Perhaps the fact that he had been a major proponent of building the dam had something to do with it too.<sup>29</sup> Senator Dumont died in 1992, having retired from the Senate with the problem unresolved, and Pahaquarry’s all-Federal-tenant population smaller than ever.

As the population plummeted, public office took on a different feel. In 1984, the town forgot to notify the county clerk that one of its township committee seats was up for election, so the ballots were printed without the office listed. As it turned out, by then, incumbents, with little to do and no competition for office, were not even “running” for election. Their names did not appear on the ballot. Rather, word was passed informally, and the handful of voters who turned out voted by write-in, mostly having to vote for themselves.<sup>30</sup>

By the early nineties, consolidation discussions with adjacent Hardwick Township had tentatively begun. Hardwick’s municipal clerk had become the acting clerk of Pahaquarry, beginning an informal relationship. Von Hagen died in 1994. Jean Zipser, who succeeded him in office, commented: "With the death of Mr. von Hagen, I think we can continue until the end of the year."<sup>31</sup> With no other eligible residents remaining, the required three-member township committee then consisted of only two members: Mayor Zipser and Harold Van Campen. They actually hung on for nearly three more years.

Zipser was an amazingly gifted person, had summered as a child in her grandparents’ historic home on Pahaquarry’s Old Mine Road, and had later moved into her parents’ former home on the same property. The building dated back to the early Dutch settlers, having been built by Abraham Van Campen, Pahaquarry’s first major land owner and civic leader, and she lived alone. She had briefly served as town clerk earlier, had been a teacher, journalist, ballet dancer, gourmet cook, and advocate for the arts and local heritage. She often traveled to New York City, where she had been born, to maintain cultural ties. With a graduate degree, she was an active opponent of the Federal presence, and at one point joined in suing the government to halt the demolition of historic buildings.<sup>32</sup>

Veteran reporter Richard Harpster had visited her home in 1978, and in an article whose reprint shows black and white pictures of almost haunting visual impact, described her lonely but fulfilled life in the historic building. Built as early as 1725,<sup>33</sup> it featured thick walls, with windows likely designed to aid in withstanding Indian attacks. A “fort,” one of a series, had been nearby,<sup>34</sup> but she would not allow exploratory excavations for fear of weakening the house’s foundation. His portrayal of a trap door to a sub-basement where women and children had been hidden during Indian raids, hand-made hinges and fireplaces, is compelling.<sup>35</sup>

Harold Van Campen, a retired bachelor farmer in his seventies, was a descendent of early Dutch settlers. He lived with his brother Walter, also a bachelor, on an old 400-acre farm near the river where they once had operated a flat-bottomed ferry. It was called the Sadie Van Campen farm, for their elderly mother, who lived there until her death in 1991 at age ninety-one. Remnants of a small sawmill, firewood and old tractors were scattered about. For some years, Walter served as caretaker of the privately owned Worthington Estate, and was instrumental in having the State of New Jersey acquire it as Worthington State Forest.<sup>36</sup> To make ends meet, both brothers had served as area fire wardens for the state.<sup>37</sup> Initially, he had gone to court when the Corps of Engineers offered him \$500 an acre for his property, when he complained that in nearby towns the going price was up to \$6,000. When the Government seized his land, he became resigned to the town’s end. When asked in 1994 to comment on the town’s predicament, he declined, saying simply “it would only bring people around.”<sup>38</sup> Walter added: “We’re just a remnant of the Dutch.” Then, placing things in perspective, he added: “But that doesn’t mean anything. The Indian was here before then.”<sup>39</sup>

Discussions with Hardwick stretched out, a stumbling block being how Pahaquarry’s municipal functions, such as they were, would be handled and financed. In 1995, the State Legislature had enacted the Sparsely Populated Municipalities Consolidation Law. Special legislation was not allowed in New Jersey, but amazingly, the provisions of this general law exactly fit the needs of Pahaquarry and Hardwick. In particular, if the population of the smaller town were under 100, the consolidation did not require an election in either town, and if, by chance, there were children requiring public education in the smaller town who lived on Federal property, the State would pay for their transportation and education. The law was pushed in the Legislature by a young Assemblyman,

Leonard Lance, who was carrying the Dumont banner forward. The wording was crafted by the Department of Community Affairs.

By 1997, true to its original commitment, the Department's Division of Local Government Services accelerated its work with affected state and local agencies to facilitate the merger. Even without the need for a public vote in Hardwick, rumors raged. If Hardwick, a rural and thinly populated town itself, took in Pahaquarry, would it be subject to being taken over by the National Park Service? Even following months of discussion, a routine meeting of the Hardwick township committee, normally attended by a small handful of residents, was overwhelmed by over a hundred people, fearful and questioning. The mayor, who had been working toward the consolidation, was clearly shaken, and later described it as a "mob scene."<sup>40</sup>

Calmer heads prevailed, but when Hardwick finally enacted the ordinance of consolidation, it was finely crafted with detailed conditions about who would pay for police coverage, roads, education, and other services.<sup>41</sup> As it turned out, Hardwick gained some minimal resources and assumed few responsibilities. The State Police, in concert with national and state rangers, would provide for law enforcement, the State would cover education, the NPS would maintain the roads and plow the snow.

By then, Pahaquarry had six remaining residents: Zipser, Van Campen, two Federal Park Service employees (not allowed to hold office by virtue of the Hatch Act), and their two children. In April of that year, both towns introduced ordinances authorizing the merger. As the July effective date approached, Mayor Zipser looked around the old Calno School, wondering what she should do. She asked about filing cabinets, old records, a pending primary election: "These are housekeeping details we have no answers for. It's like attending a death."<sup>42</sup> It was a theme she repeated.<sup>43</sup>

On July 2, 1997, an unprecedented cavalcade of state and local officials drove up the Old Mine Road and crowded into the old Calno School.<sup>44</sup> A band came from a distant school, as did former residents.

*A Joint Special Meeting of the Hardwick Township Committee and the Pahaquarry Township Committee and various Officials from the Department of Community Affairs and the Governor's Office was held at the old Calno*

*School ... in Pahaquarry Township. This meeting was called to order by the Township Clerk at 1:00 PM.*<sup>45</sup>

Jean Zipser was praised as the only mayor in the state to always receive one hundred percent voter support, an ironic comment which she bore with dignity. In the joint meeting, Beth Gates, the state Director of Local Government Services signed a formal declaration which was attested to by the two mayors, and the merger was accomplished.<sup>46</sup>



Jean Zipser (l) hugs former resident on Pahaquarry's last day at Calno School.<sup>47</sup>



Jean Zipser at ceremony ending Pahaquarry's municipal existence.

That day, Pahaquarry Township, as a governmental entity, ceased to exist. Its land and responsibilities, along with an accumulated cash surplus of over \$125,000,<sup>48</sup> were now part of Hardwick Township, which now had a total population of less than 1,500 spread over nearly 38 square miles. New Jersey's municipalities count dropped from 567 to 566.

Although Zipser was no longer a Mayor, she remained as a Federal tenant in the historic home where her parents had lived, and negotiated a program with the National Park Service to promote writing and understanding of local heritage, involving rehabilitation of another old building on the property that other family members had once enjoyed. She referred to the latter as "Julia's Place," in honor of her grandmother Julia Orthwine, who in 1926 had purchased the property and rehabilitated it. Zipser also created the Pahaquarry Foundation to support such efforts.

In fact, although now out of public office, she attended the next meeting of the Hardwick Township Committee on July 9, and asked for support for the Pahaquarry Foundation's work.

Later, she wrote:

*I abhor what has happened to my community, Pahaquarry Township, which was forced out of existence. I have struggled to turn my bitterness and anger into something positive. Preserving the wonderful, historic houses is a way for me to assuage my grief. It combines my deep feelings for family heritage and regional history with my civic mindedness.*<sup>49</sup>

But this was not the end of the story.

## Epilogue



Calno School, October, 2018, photo by author.

On a lovely October day in 2018, with the leaves just starting to turn in an exhilarating coolness in the valley, this author returned to the old Calno School on the Old Mine Road. It still stands, now boarded up, but kept painted and bearing itself well, standing guard alone over the Pahaquarry Flat leading down to the Delaware.



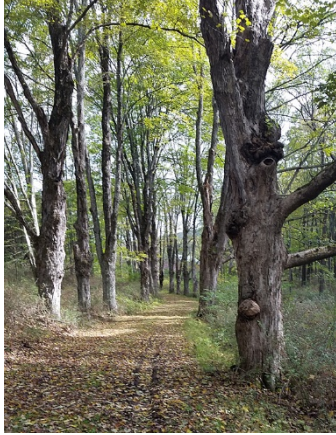


These two pictures, provided by the National Park Service, show the interior of the School. Being on the Pahaquarry Flat, the building is subject to occasional flooding, as seen in the photo on the right after the 2006 floods. For many years, the old school/municipal building served as a deer hunt weighing station, as seen on the blackboard tabulation.

After a pause for reflection, we headed farther north, just a few hundred yards as it turned out, seeking Jean Zipser's old home. We knew it was on a hill on the east side of the Old Mine Road. It had been known as the Abraham Van Campen house, named after its original occupant, and the oldest home in Warren County, around which battles with the Indians had reportedly occurred. When Warren County had broken off from Sussex County, the newly created Pahaquarry Township was organized at a town meeting held here in March 1825. Nearby, hidden in the brambles, the Van Campen graveyard was said to remain, with tombstones dating back to the 1700s. In her youth, she had visited her grandmother in the nearby B. B. Van Campen home on the property. Later, her parents had lived on the property in the Abraham Van Campen home, closer to the Old Mine Road.

Spotting a dirt side road, we parked, hopped over an ever-present trickle of water, ducked under a Park Service gate, and started climbing the hill, wondering what we would find. A tire track in the dirt gave hope, and soon we were walking between two rows of old trees – hickories, and sugar maples with magnificent burls. Many decades earlier, someone had cared. A sense of presence emerged.





Ahead through the trees, we spotted a white building, and the track opened on to a magnificent meadow. First, we saw several red barns at some distance across, then at the left, the old B. B. Van Campen home that Jean had hoped to become a center for learning, to be called “Julia’s Place,” after her grandmother Julia Orthwine, who had lived there.

*Photo by author.*



*B. B. Van Campen House, formerly "Honeysuckle Lodge," being restored by National Park Service in hopes of becoming "Julia's Place," 2000. <sup>50</sup>*



*"Julia's Place," empty and overgrown, 2018. The building was boarded up, in a sensitive way, but desolate nonetheless. <sup>51</sup>*

But “Julia’s Place” had not come to be. The Pahaquarry Foundation had not been able to raise sufficient funds, and had come to an end, and the Park Service’s funds were severely overstretched.<sup>52</sup>

Walking farther, we encountered the Abraham Van Campen house, overlooking the valley across the Old Mine Road, where Jean had lived. Taking over the lease from her parents, she had lived alone in the old house, with its thick walls, wide planked floors and fireplaces, joined by several cats and her faithful Sheltie companion, Belle. Rich in history and features, it too was boarded up, again, with care.

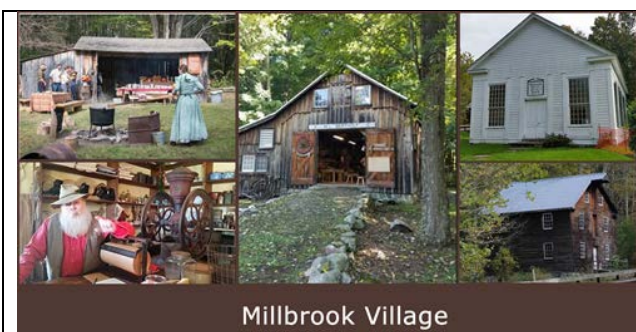


*Abraham Van Campen House 1941, from Old Mine Road. One of the oldest remaining homes in Warren County.<sup>53</sup>*



*Abraham Van Campen House, boarded up, from meadow side, October 2018.<sup>54</sup>*

The meadow and lawns had recently been mowed, giving hope for some respect if not resurrection. Later we learned that the Park Service was in the process of prioritizing some newly-available funds for the preservation of a small number of historic structures in the park, of which there are an estimated 350.<sup>55</sup> This gave hope, which no doubt Jean would have seized upon.



Millbrook Village

*The National Park Service has relocated some old buildings to Millbrook, several miles north, to represent a sense of earlier community life.<sup>56</sup>*



*Along the Old Mine Road and elsewhere throughout the Park, buildings are gradually collapsing for lack of funds. This was the old Blasi farm home.<sup>57</sup>*

Returning to the road, we headed south, passing the old Calno School. At a point where a trail to the old copper mines starts, the Old Mine Road takes a dip and slight curve as it climbs again, and we thought of Jean's interest in dance, which was a sustaining feature of her otherwise solitary life in Pahaquarry. Her grandfather had started *Dance Magazine* in New York City, a publication



dedicated to the art of formal dance, and Jean herself had become an accomplished ballet dancer, with a new interest in the tango.



*The Old Mine Road, looking north from near entrance to the Copper Mine trail<sup>58</sup>.*

On February 16, 2006, the Warren County Dispatch Center received a report of a car crash on the Old Mine Road:

*Alone in her car near that point on this historic road, Jean Danis Zipser, the last Mayor of Pahaquarry, and one of its last residents, had lost control of her car on black ice and was killed instantly.<sup>59</sup> She was on her way to take a tango lesson across the river.<sup>60</sup>*

Earlier, she had written:

*There is something that moves my heart in a way I can't describe when I begin the drive down the mountain into the valley and home. It's an issue of the heart I think, much like love.<sup>61</sup>*



*Pahaquarry Flat, between Old Mine Road and the Delaware.<sup>62</sup>*

One might think that the story now ends here, with the loss of the town, and later its last Mayor at age 59. But in the days following the consolidation of Pahaquarry into Hardwick Township, and indeed for eons to come, the deer who romp across the Pahaquarry Flat behind the Old Calno School, if they were thinking creatures, might have something to discuss. When the old town hall in Calno School was being cleaned out in the spring of 1997 upon the town's dissolution, Zipser had come across a proposed plan for a new subdivision of homes dating back to 1963. It had not been approved then, and with the land now in control of the National Park Service, such could never occur in the future. The section of the river above the Gap itself is now designated by Congress as part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, affording additional protection.

The land today, many of its sparsely located historic buildings sagging, overgrown, and subject to vandalism, is seeing the return of the forests of yesteryear. The graveyards of the colonial settlers and their descendants in the valley are largely hidden among briars and intruding trees. The small federal park envisioned on both sides of the river on the periphery of the planned reservoir behind the dam is much larger than planned because there is no dam, and the National Park Service, although valiantly trying, is not adequately funded to cope. The park headquarters is on the Pennsylvania side, and most of the visitors on the Old Mine Road, often coming as hikers or to enjoy the scenery, have little interest in the Pahaquarry that its residents once knew.

Had the dam been built, things would have been different, but not better.<sup>63</sup> When the Corps of Engineers had conducted test borings around Tocks Island, they learned that the substructure left by the retreating Wisconsin Glacier was unstable and would not support the planned dam. They then shifted its proposed location to just south of the island, and altered the design to spread the weight out over a larger area. There are those who believe that even there the dam would have eventually suffered catastrophic failure.

The sad and in many ways misguided efforts to build a dam, and then an underfunded park, had resulted in the loss of a way of life for worthy citizens and the deterioration of their physical structures. Pahaquarry as a town and as a very special place for several hundred wonderful years had ended. But the Old Mine Road endures, and no doubt has many stories yet to tell.

Indeed, the preservation of this hard yet gentle land seems assured, with parts now reverting slowly to the way it had been in the time of the Lenape, the “place between the mountains beside the waters.” Now, Pahaquarry and its neighboring riverside towns assume the role of a refuge of time and nature in the center of the megalopolis on the eastern seaboard.<sup>64</sup>

And the trees, the eagles, the beavers, the osprey, the rolling fields, and the flowing waters of the Delaware would no doubt join with the deer in expressing approval, as would many humans, in some cases with a deep sense of sadness.

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Jean Danis Zipser, the Last Mayor of Pahaquarry,  
at her home, the Abraham Van Campen House on the Old Mine Road.<sup>65</sup>

## About the Author:

A native of Spring Lake, NJ, and graduate of Middlebury College and the University of Pennsylvania, Jim Alexander spent a career in local and state government management in New Jersey, including twenty-seven years with the Department of Community Affairs. For many years he wrote about and taught municipal management and finance. More recently he has participated in nonprofit consulting, as well as in website and IT management. His writings include those on local government, railroad history, and human-interest subjects.

## Additional Information:

The online presentation of this article in PDF format, along with a video program, additional photos and more information, may be found at the author's website: <https://jimquest.com/writ-history-tocks-island/>

## NOTES:

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<sup>1</sup> Artistic Impression of old Calno School by Jo Ann Alexander, based on photo by Chang W. Lee in Chen, David W., "A New Jersey Township Votes Itself Nonexistent," *New York Times*, April 28, 1997. The photo looked just like the building had on the evening in the early seventies.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Charlton Beck, *The roads of Home: Lanes and Legends of New Jersey* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1956), Tenth Printing, Chapter 1, Land of Waiting.

<sup>3</sup> Herbert C. Kraft, *The Archaeology of the Tocks Island Area*, (South Orange, NJ: Seton Hall University Museum, 1975.)

<sup>4</sup> Leonard E. Brown, *Historical Base Map, Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, New Jersey*. (Denver: National Park Service, March 1973).

<sup>5</sup> James P. Snell, *History of Sussex and Warren Counties, New Jersey* (Philadelphia: Everts & Peck, 1881).

<sup>6</sup> See list of names of burials in Calno Cemetery prepared by Gannett Fleming Corddry & Carpenter Inc. for the Federal government, accessed at <http://raub-and-more.com/calnocem.html> for examples. These names occur regularly in a wide variety of publications about the area.

<sup>7</sup> Recollection of Mina Hamilton, former resident, in emails to author, April 6, 2021 and September 18, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Worthington State Forest, Skylands Visitor website, accessed November 20, 2018 from <http://www.njskylands.com/pkworthington>.

<sup>9</sup> Richard C. Albert, *Damming the Delaware* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1987).

<sup>10</sup> Sweetman, Jennie, "Public input sought on national park's historic buildings," *New Jersey Herald*, November 4, 2018.

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<sup>11</sup> Numbers vary depending on source. See, EG, Donald Janson, "Tocks Dam: Story of a 13-Year Failure," *New York Times*, August 4, 1975; and Duca-Sandberg, Kathleen, "The History of the Tocks Island Dam Project: Environmental War or the War in Vietnam," Master's Thesis, Seton Hall University, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Postcard, author's collection.

<sup>13</sup> Cunningham, John, "Tercentenary Tales: The Old Mine Road," *The Madison Eagle*, January 10, 1963.

<sup>14</sup> C. G. Hine, *The Old Mine Road*. Original 1908, reprinted in 1985 by Rutgers University Press (New Brunswick, NJ. Recounts his walk down the old road one summer, with extensive historical observations.

<sup>15</sup> "Citizens Say Blackout is Permanent in Pahaquarry," *Freeport Journal Standard* (United Press), March 16, 1942.

<sup>16</sup> Janson, Donald, "Tocks Dam: Story of 13-Year Failure," *New York Times*, August 4, 1975

<sup>17</sup> Schurr, Brendan, "Backwoods Town Considers Packing It In," *Los Angeles Times* (Associated Press), December 11, 1994.

<sup>18</sup> Chen, David W., "Six People Away from a Ghost Town; Pahaquarry, New Jersey's Tiniest Municipality Tries to Disappear," *New York Times*, October 27, 1995. Provides extensive feel and facts of the situation.

<sup>19</sup> Special to the *New York Times*, "Town at Tocks Island Site Dies Slowly," December 28, 1972 edition.

<sup>20</sup> Walsh, Ed, "Byrne, Case Stall Tocks Island Dam," *Asbury Park Press*, July 21, 1974.

<sup>21</sup> "Town at Tocks Island Site Dies Slowly." *New York Times*. December 28, 1972.

<sup>22</sup> Dennis Bertland, Patricia Valence, and Russell Woodling, *The Minisink: A chronicle of one of America's first and last frontiers*, Four-County Task Force on the Tocks Island Dam Project, July 1975, Second Printing, March 1976. A school, has been on this site since the 1870s.

<sup>23</sup> Kraft, *The Archaeology of the Tocks Island Area*.

<sup>24</sup> Special to the *New York Times*, "Town at Tocks Island Site Dies Slowly," December 28, 1972 edition.

<sup>25</sup> Ferretti, Fred, "Urban and Rural Jersey Face Unwanted Changes," *New York Times*, February 26, 1973. Also see Walsh, Ed, "Byrne, Case Stall Tocks Island Dam," *Asbury Park Press*, July 21, 1974 for problems face in dislodging squatters in Pahaquarry.

<sup>26</sup> Walsh, Ed, "Byrne, Case Stall Tocks Dam Project," *Asbury Park Press*, July 21, 1974. Paraphrased quote.

<sup>27</sup> "U. S. Marshals Roust Colony of Squatters From Site of Tocks Island Dam Project," *Observer-Reporter*, February 28, 1974.

<sup>28</sup> Janson, Donald, "Evicted Tocks Island Squatters Offered Food, Clothes and Land," *New York Times*, March 2, 1974.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Fritzky, *A Pox on Tocks*, retrieved from

[https://www.academia.edu/31435722/A\\_Pox\\_on\\_Tocks](https://www.academia.edu/31435722/A_Pox_on_Tocks), October 29, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Levin, Jay, "Politicians in Pahaquarry turn out the vote, or maybe 3 or 4," *Daily Record of Morristown*, November 3, 1985.

<sup>31</sup> Schurr, Brendan, "Backwoods Town Considers Packing It In," December 11, 1994.

<sup>32</sup> "Judge orders Tocks building demolition halt," *Pocono Record*, April 23, 1974.

<sup>33</sup> "Colonel Abram Van Campen (Great Uncle) Homestead," in *Moses Van Campen ... In Tribute* website, retrieved from <http://www.mosesvancampen.com/cavch> November 8, 2018; this suggests 1725.

However, the Historic American Buildings Survey by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, Department of Interior, "Colonel Abraham Van Campen House, HABS No. NJ-430, in an Addendum dated June 1968, revises this to "about 1750." (Retrieved from

<http://cdn.loc.gov/master/pnp/habshaer/nj/nj0800/nj0858/data/nj0858data.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> HABS No. NJ-430.

<sup>35</sup> Harpster, Richard E., "American History Lives, in Pahaquarry Twp., Van Campen House Has Survived Indian Raids, As Well as Tocks Island Dam," *Daily Record of Morristown*, February 26, 1978.

<sup>36</sup> Richard C. Albert, *Damming the Delaware*, 92.



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<sup>37</sup> State of New Jersey Department of Conservation and Economic development, Forest Fire Service, *Forest Fire Wardens*, 1964.

<sup>38</sup> Schurr, "Backwoods Town Considers Packing It In," December 11, 1994. Van Campen died in 2001, having said at the time of Pahaquarry's demise: "What happens will be. Not much you can do about it. It's a changing time, a changing world."

<sup>39</sup> Markham, James. M., "Tocks Island: Home to Squatters," *New York Times*, September 8, 1971.

<sup>40</sup> Ryzewicz, Keith, "Few mourned passing of Pahaquarry," *Courier News* (Bridgewater), December 20, 1999.

<sup>41</sup> Ordinance No. 97/3, Township of Hardwick, County of Warren, State of New Jersey. An Ordinance to Consolidate the Township of Hardwick with the Township of Pahaquarry Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40:43-66.78 Et Seq. Introduced April 2, 1997.

<sup>42</sup> Chen, David W., "A New Jersey Township Votes Itself nonexistent," *New York Times*, April 28, 1997.

<sup>43</sup> "This was a township in its death throes," Ryzewicz, "Few mourned passing of Pahaquarry," *Courier News*; and Florida, Robert, "Tiny town becomes history," *Daily Record*, Morristown, July 3, 1997 ("I feel like a mourner, like someone close to me has died.").

<sup>44</sup> Florida, "Tiny town becomes history," *Daily Record*, Morristown.

<sup>45</sup> Minutes of the Township Committee of Hardwick Township, July 2, 1997. Provided by Judith M. Fisher, RMC, Municipal Clerk.

<sup>46</sup> Email conversations with Beth Gates, former Director, Division of Local Government Services, and Marc Pfeiffer, former Assistant Director, October 2018. A copy of the formal declaration, dated July 2, 1997 and filed with the Secretary of State as required by statute, was obtained from the New Jersey Secretary of State's Archives; a copy is also now available in the Hardwick Township's Municipal Clerk's office.

<sup>47</sup> Florida, Robert, "Tiny town becomes history," *Daily Record*, Morristown, July 3, 1997.

<sup>48</sup> Different sources indicate different surplus figures transferred, some closer to \$150,000, a reflection of the frugality of Pahaquarry's governance even in the face of unprecedented challenges. *The 57<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the Division of Local Government Services, Statements of Financial Condition of Counties and Municipalities* (Trenton) showed a year end surplus of \$152,000 for the year 1994.

<sup>49</sup> Zipser, Jean, "Shall We Dance? Partnering with the National Park Service," *Cultural Resource Management: Saved from the Dam*, Volume 25, No. 3, 2002.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Photo by author, October 2018.

<sup>52</sup> Kathleen Sandt, Public Affairs Specialist, National Park Service, Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, email correspondence with author dated November 13, 2018. She also provided insight into the history and current status of the area, as well as the location of several buildings.

<sup>53</sup> Photo from Library of Congress, *Historic American Buildings Survey*, 1941.

<sup>54</sup> Photo by author, October 2018.

<sup>55</sup> See <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectId=62667>

<sup>56</sup> Photos by author and from National Park Service publications.

<sup>57</sup> Photo by author, October 2018.

<sup>58</sup> Photo by author, October 2018. Shows the road descending just before the curve where the road climbs again. Start of the trail up to the old copper mines is at the right, just out of view.

<sup>59</sup> Duca-Sandberg, "The History of the Tocks Island Dam Project," 94. Also see Annie Shaver-Crandell, *The Thinking Woman's Almanac*, retrieved from

<http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs104/1102766514344/archive/1116448936885.html>, and

"Delaware Water Gap Recreation Resident Jean Zipser Killed in Auto Accident," US Fed News Service, February 14, 2006, retrieved from HighBeam Research, at <https://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P3-990094131.html> on November 5, 2018.

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<sup>60</sup> Resnick, Marin, "'Vision' helps transform dreams into reality," nj.com, Warren Reporter Archive, March 24, 2008, retrieved from

[http://blog.nj.com/warrenreporter/2008/03/vision\\_helps\\_transform\\_dreams.html](http://blog.nj.com/warrenreporter/2008/03/vision_helps_transform_dreams.html)

<sup>61</sup> Schurr, Brendan, "A very down town: Jersey Village soon may not be around," *The Paducah Sun* (Paducah, Kentucky – Associated Press), December 2, 1994.

<sup>62</sup> Photo of Pahaquarry Flats by Nicholas A. Tonelli, October 13, 2007, [https://www.flickr.com/photos/nicholas\\_t/1557194441/in/photostream/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/nicholas_t/1557194441/in/photostream/), used under Creative Commons License, accessed November 21, 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Janson, Donald, "Study Finds Feasible Alternatives to Tocks Island Dam," *New York Times*, June 29, 1975.

<sup>64</sup> For a poignant view of happenings in adjacent Walpack, see: Wang, Christopher, "NJ town shrinks from existence," *New Jersey Herald*, October 14, 2018.

<sup>65</sup> "The Last Citizens of Pahaquarry,"

<http://sevenblazes.wixsite.com/pahaquarry/thelastcitizensofpahaquarry>, accessed November 17, 2018.