

History of Paupack Township by Ann O'Hara

Although Paupack was the site of one of the earliest settlements in Northeastern Pennsylvania, it did not become a separate township until 1850, when the citizens of the southeastern portion of Palmyra petitioned for their own township so they would not have to travel so far to vote. The name came from the Wallenpaupack Creek.

Before the French and Indian War a man named Carter had settled at Wallenpaupack, and although he and his family were murdered, his place was always a post on the route from Connecticut to the Wyoming Settlement on the Susquehanna. A portion of the western part of the township was in the dark and dreary swamp known as "The Shades of Death," hardly an encouraging site for growth.

The early settlers found many traces of Indian occupation, and the story was told that a band of Indians had spent time in the area after being forced from their territory and on their way farther west.

In the early 19th century, when its turnpikes were major commercial throughfares, the little towns of Paupack were considered to be future metropolises, but competition from Hawley and Honesdale, as well as the advent of the railroad, dimmed those hopes, and soon the major product of the largely rural township was lumber. Before the construction of the Wallenpaupack Dam, the Wallenpaupack Creek was navigable for small steamboats from Wilsonville (now submerged) to Ledgedale.

Lumbering and products of the forest were important to Paupack Township. Lumber rafted down the river brought excellent prices as long as it lasted, and the wood to construct the ship-house in the Philadelphia Navy Yard was brought from Hemlock Hollow, as was much of the timber used to build the great ship of the day, the "Pennsylvania."

The first family to settle in the unbroken wilderness was that of Silas Purdy, who came in 1793 from Kingston, NY by way of the Cushetunk Settlement in Damascus Township and the Wallenpaupack Settlement in what is now Pike County. Although conditions were harsh, he and his wife Hannah eventually raised a large family and prospered, although they left for the greener pastures of the lake country of Western New York. Fortunately, they left behind many descendants.

Elder William Purdy, a cousin of Silas from Connecticut, also arrived in Paupack in 1793, raised another large family, began preaching as he built his farm, and eventually became the pastor of the Palmyra Baptist Church. For many years, the Purdys had few neighbors and constituted most of the population. Eventually other settlers arrived, among them Major John Ansley,

Samuel Hartford, Ambrose Buckingham and Uriah Williams. Even after the formation of the township, an early list of taxpayers numbered only eighty-one.

The first sawmill was built before 1800 by Silas Purdy and shortly afterward he opened a tavern on his farm, on the road leading from the Wallenpaupack settlement to Cherry Ridge. He then built a gristmill, the only one for miles around, patronized by settlers from Salem, Cherry Ridge and even Mt. Pleasant.

In 1874 Darius G. Purdy and William Hankins started an establishment for the manufacture of saw and fork handles and umbrella sticks at Purdyville.

The first postmaster was (no surprise) R. R. Purdy at Purdyville, in 1839. The first school stood on the bank of a brook in Purdyville.

The building of Lake Wallenpaupack began in the early 1900s and was completed in 1926, bringing great change to the township. Homes and farms were flooded and disappeared forever, but the energy generated by the huge hydroelectric project brought electricity and the beautiful scenery brought tourists, the new economic base of Paupack Township. Today Paupack is a Mecca for visitors and second-home owners and one of the fastest growing townships in Wayne County. Paupack Township encompasses 24 miles of the northern shore line of Lake Wallenpaupack. Summer activities include beaches, boating, fishing and lake front restaurants. Winter activities included ice fishing, snowmobiling and local skiing.

Acknowledgments

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