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# Representations of the Local Past: Gilded Age and Bureaucratic Accounts of the Minisink, 1889 to the Present

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# Representations of the Local Past: Gilded Age and Bureaucratic Accounts of the Minisink, 1889 to the Present

## **Cover Page Footnote**

In writing this paper, and in several earlier versions, I have sought the insights of Fred Myers, Faye Ginsburg, and Tom Bender of New York University, Anne-Marie Cantwell of Rutgers University-Newark, and my colleague Roselle Henn at the New York District, Corps of Engineers. Without the guidance of Peter Osborne, Executive Director of the Minisink Valley historical Society, much of the research would have been impossible. It was Bert Salwen, however, who first convinced me that studying local pasts (whether in Indonesia or the Minisink) was worthwhile. He always believed that regional studies had a place in the university. Bert encouraged a generation of students who shared his interest in Native American and early European cultures of the northeastern United States. I'm sorry he is not around to read this.

## REPRESENTATIONS OF THE LOCAL PAST: GILDED AGE AND BUREAUCRATIC ACCOUNTS OF THE MINISINK, 1889 TO THE PRESENT

Wendy Harris

*The process whereby local pasts are made meaningful varies through time and among different communities. While historians, philosophers, and anthropologists have long been intrigued by the problem of historical practice, their discussions remain speculative. This paper examines the specific social conditions of production of a single local past. During the late 19th century, the members of the Minisink Valley Historical Society in Port Jervis, New York, engaged in the imaginative construction of a place they named "the Minisink"—an early frontier region encompassing portions of the Upper Delaware River Valley. The Society's account is examined and compared to accounts produced a century later by cultural resource management professionals engaged in the interpretation of the same past.*

*Le processus par lequel les passés locaux sont rendus parlants varie avec le temps et entre différentes collectivités. Les historiens, les philosophes et les anthropologues ont longtemps été intrigués par le problème de la pratique historique, mais leurs propos demeurent conjecturaux. L'article examine les conditions sociales particulières de la production d'un passé local. Au cours de la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, les membres de la Minisink Valley Historical Society à Fort Jervis (New York) se sont occupés à la construction imaginative d'un endroit qu'ils ont appelé "the Minisink," soit une région frontrière très ancienne comprenant des parties de vallée du Haut-Delaware. Les vues de la Société sont examinées et comparées avec celle formulées un siècle plus tard par des professionnels de la gestion des ressources culturelles qui ont cherché à expliquer le même passé.*

### Introduction

Straddling both sides of the Upper Delaware River, extending north from the Delaware Water Gap, and containing portions of the states of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania is a 60 mi stretch of territory said to be one of North America's "earliest and most important" frontiers (Bertland, Valence, and Woodling 1975: vii, 47-64; Fischler and Mueller 1991: 58). On late 17th- and 18th-century maps and in travellers' writings, it appears as the

Minisink "Province" or "Country." Captain Arent Schuyler visited the region in 1694, referring to it in his journal as "the Minissinck Country." He did so, most likely, in deference to the Native American inhabitants of the region, known then as the Minnissincks (Kraft 1981: 29). For Europeans of that time, the Minisink lay on the edge of the known world (FIG. 1).

Eventually the Native Americans were driven away or died of disease.



Figure 1. "Minisink of the Backlands."  
Detail taken from Nicholas J. Visscher's  
"Novi Belgii Noveque Anglie," 1656.

The association of the place name "Minisink" with the Upper Delaware region continued into the 18th century, however. Kraft (1981: 38), describing the boundaries of the 18th-century Minisink, concluded: "from the personal names included in the records it is apparent that most residents of the Minisink precinct lived in and around Mahekkamack or Port Jervis, New York."

By the end of the 19th century, the idea of the Minisink as a neighborhood—a place with a distinct spatial identity—was in eclipse. As a place name, it is absent from maps and local newspapers. Wiebe (1967) and others have suggested that traditional allegiances to older and more vaguely bounded localities were severed by industrial capitalism and the rise of the nation state. Certainly, in the Delaware River Valley, with the ap-

pearance of counties, townships, and other municipal entities, older territorial divisions such as the Minisink—with its boundaries cross-cutting those of three states—must have seemed increasingly anachronistic. The Minisink persisted, however, as a site of historical inscription and memory in the works of a handful of amateur scholars (Gumaer 1844, 1890; Stickney 1867; Quinlan 1851). In 1889, the forgotten landscape of the Minisink was redefined in the constitution of the newly formed Minisink Valley Historical Society (MVHS).

The present article examines the first collective effort to assemble a history for the Minisink by the founding members of the MVHS. The article also analyzes contemporary accounts of the Minisink's past by cultural resource management (CRM) professionals who, since the absorption of much of the Upper Delaware region into the National Park System, are now responsible for overseeing and interpreting many of the region's historical sites and events. Gupta and Ferguson (1992: 11) remind us that "places are always imagined in the context of political-economic determinations that have a logic all their own." Thus, in an effort to understand why divergent imagined (although not imaginary) pasts occur, the author is exploring the historical and cultural frameworks within which such accounts are fashioned. The specific sites and events constituting the Minisink's history are not the primary concern of this study. Rather, emphasis is upon the meaning of the historical landscape as constructed and experienced by men and women engaged in the production of historical knowledge—a form of knowledge best understood, it will be argued, as "something eminently social" (Durkheim 1965: 22).

## A Society to Preserve Our Early Local History

In 1889, with a population approaching 9,000, Port Jervis (the MVHS's home) was the Upper Delaware River Valley's largest town. Founded in the 1820s, Port Jervis was a product of the canal and railroad eras, post-dating the Valley's first European settlers by a century and a half. As the terminus of the Erie Railroad, late 19th-century Port Jervis supported a growing number of factories and workers, many of whom were foreign born (Ruttenber and Clark 1881: 740-741).

Port Jervis's wealth and power lay in the hands of a small group of local and highly visible elites. They were the region's businessmen, lawyers, doctors, and clergy. They held the public offices, owned the banks and most of the real estate, financed the county's railroad lines, and controlled the town's gas and water. The men who met one winter's evening in 1889 for the purpose of founding the Minisink Valley Historical Society were members of this class (Chapman Publishing Company 1895; MVHS 1889, 1890; Ruttenber and Clark 1881). Their goal, as stated in their constitution, was to collect and preserve the history of a place they called the "ancient" Minisink Territory. The individual histories of the Upper Delaware Valley, Orange County, and Port Jervis were not addressed in this document (MVHS 1889). The MVHS's founders, it seems, were drawn to an older, more remote past.

Meeting for the first time at the office of a local doctor, the MVHS's founding members adjourned to the Delaware House Hotel for an eight-course meal and innumerable after-dinner speeches. The following summer, they met again—this time to observe

the 110th anniversary of the Battle of Minisink, a Revolutionary War skirmish in which many local settlers had been killed. Whereas 20 men had attended the Society's winter meeting, 600 men, women, and children turned out on a sunny July day for an afternoon of picnicking, patriotic speeches, singing, socializing, and prayers. It was a very auspicious beginning for the Society (MVHS 1889).

For the remainder of the 19th century and into the 20th, the members of the Society continued to attend meetings and banquets. They wrote and presented speeches and papers, furnished their meeting rooms with display cases and bookshelves, gathered together relics and old documents, and made pilgrimages to sites of historical interest.

These are the circumstances surrounding the production of much of the extant knowledge of the history of an early frontier community. Prior to this time, the telling of the Minisink's history was the pursuit of solitary, often elderly, amateur scholars (Gumaer 1844, 1890; Stickney 1867). Why Port Jervis's most prominent citizens—the community's capitalists, politicians, and professionals, many of whom were in the prime of life and in the midst of busy careers—should suddenly appropriate a historical world is explored below.

## The World of the Founders

During the first ten years of its existence, the MVHS drew its membership from the elites of Port Jervis and the surrounding counties of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Although overwhelmingly white, male, and Protestant, the membership was composed of two formerly distinct but now

intermarrying subgroups—the Dutch and Huguenot gentry and an emergent class of capitalists and merchants.

Those with French or Dutch surnames could trace their ancestry to families who had arrived in the region as early as the 1690s. Also listed on the Society's membership rolls, alongside Cuddebacks, Swartwouts, Gumaers, Eltings, and Van Inwegans, were the names of other members whose wealth was acquired more recently. The region's capitalists, "new" families such as the St. Johns and the Farnums, came to the area with the Delaware and Hudson Canal (c. 1828). Here they established the "scattering settlement" at Port Jervis. Any MVHS member who was not a St. John or a Farnum, or directly descended from a Hollander or Huguenot, was invariably linked to one or to both groups through ties of marriage or business partnership (Chapman Publishing Company 1895; MVHS 1889, 1890; Ruttenber and Clark 1881).

As a class, Port Jervis's late 19th-century elites appear closely knit. Gleaned from the pages of Orange County's atlases, the lives of MVHS members seem secure, prosperous, and successful. Local newspapers, however, tell a darker story of labor unrest, political upset, and financial instability. This is not surprising. Their time, the Gilded Age, was a period of great economic and social transformation. Historian Alan Trachtenberg (1982: 4–5) describes it as "a period of trauma, of change so swift and thorough that many Americans seemed unable to fathom the extent of the upheaval." As discussed below, the men who controlled Port Jervis had reason to be uneasy as the century grew to a close.

## A Time of Crisis

Against the backdrop of the Gilded Age, in Port Jervis, among one segment of the town's population, a discourse describing the local past emerged. The social, political, and economic circumstances associated with this discourse warrant closer examination.

For Port Jervis's late 19th-century elites, threats to the established order originated from within as well as from outside their own community. The period was marked by seemingly endless cycles of depression and recovery (Lears 1981: 29). It was a time when enormous fortunes could be made. During one year, 1878, however, American businesses went bankrupt at a rate of 900 a month (Trachtenberg 1982: 39). By the end of the century 40% of the nation's railroad mileage was in receivership (Wiebe 1967: 26). Even the most optimistic small town booster would feel vulnerable in a financial climate such as this.

Old stock American elites also feared the social disorder that accompanied economic hard times. Historian Robert Wiebe (1967: xii) has written about the breakdown of the self-contained 19th-century community. The health of such a place, he observes, "depended upon...its abilities to manage the lives of its members and the belief among its members that the community had such powers." Even by the 1870s, Wiebe notes, such assumptions were being undermined.

Prior to the Civil War, America was a rural, homogeneous society of farmers, shopkeepers, and artisans. Although many would deny it, by the second half of the century, it had become a nation of culturally diverse urban wage earners. Between 1870 and 1900 the population doubled. A third

of these people were industrial workers. One out of three was an immigrant and almost all lived in cities (Boyer 1978: 123-124; Trachtenberg 1982: 87-88).

With the shifting demographics came unprecedented labor unrest. By the 1880s, class warfare must have seemed unavoidable. During that decade there were close to 10,000 strikes and walkouts. Eighteen eighty-six was known as the year of "The Great Upheaval"; 700,000 workers struck. It was also the year of the Knights of Labor strike and the Haymarket Square Riot in Chicago (Lears 1981: 29; Trachtenberg 1982: 89-90). Port Jervis had its own history of labor activism dating to the Erie Strikes of the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s. The machine shop and roundhouse of that line employed hundreds of men. Accounts in the *Port Jervis Gazette* document their participation in a series of actions (*PJG* 23 July 1883; 24, 26; February 1874; 16 November 1869). The *Gazette* also reported the visit of Henry George of the Knights of Labor Party to Port Jervis in September of 1887. The audience, composed of the town's "labor element," crowded the Opera House, filling it "from top to bottom" (*PJG* 23 September 1887).

Other, more amorphous concerns also worried local elites. In the late 19th century, as the country became increasingly industrial, urban, and bureaucratic, the locally based entrepreneurial capitalism of the early 19th century had begun to give way to modern forms of corporate ownership. Although small town elites, such as the MVHS's members, would never entirely lose their power, they were forced to contend, in many aspects of their personal and professional lives, with the rise of a bureaucratic corporate state and the emergence of a national ruling

class (Lears 1981: 9, 26-32; Trachtenberg 1982: 4; Wiebe 1967).

Closer to home, there were more concrete challenges to existing hierarchies of power and wealth. In the 1887 elections, the Republican Party failed to gain control of the city. "It was water and gas against the people and electric light," proclaimed the *Gazette*, mouthpiece of the Democratic Party, "and the people, being under the benign influence of the light, won" (*PJG* 4 April 1887). For the next two years Port Jervis would be under Democratic control. For the many MVHS founding members who had ties to the Farnum and St. John families, the National Bank of Port Jervis, the Port Jervis Waterworks Company, and the Port Jervis Gaslight Company, such a prospect could not have been pleasant (Chapman Publishing Company 1895: 961, 1071-1072, 1418-1470; Ruttener and Clark 1881: 730-738).

### The Minisink Remembered

Literary critic Frederic Jameson believes that all narrative is essentially political. As collective or class discourse, the stories a group tells about itself emerge as "symbolic meditations on the destiny of community" (Jameson 1981: 70). In Jameson's model, accounts of the past, such as those produced by MVHS at the end of the last century, can be socially situated.

Gilded Age Port Jervis was largely a creation of MVHS members and their families. But by 1889, when they looked around them, many of those who had spent their childhoods in Port Jervis barely recognized the place. The town had seen virtually all of its growth since the Civil War. In 1853 the population stood at 2,585. Antebellum Port Jervis supported five

stores, three churches, three taverns, a school house, and a five-story grist mill (Ruttenber and Clark 1881: 710). By 1892, four years after the MVHS's founding, the census reported a population of over 10,000 (Mercantile Publishing Company 1892: 9). The New York legislature would finally declare Port Jervis a city in 1907. At that time it was reported to have 82 "industrial establishments" including the machine shops of the Erie Railroad that employed over 1,000 workers (Headley 1908: 210-211).

At the MVHS's first meeting in February 1889, and at many meetings thereafter, members presented reminiscences and narrative reconstructions of a vanished world and its inhabitants. Dr. John Conkling had come to Port Jervis as a young man in 1830, just as the Erie Canal was opening. In an after-dinner speech before the MVHS, he recalled the landscape of his youth (MVHS 1889).

Every building below the hill, on the flats, has been erected since the railroad was completed—banks, stores, and saloons, opera house; and even the Delaware House, where you partook of your dinner of eight courses, stands where a field of rye was cultivated, and between this and the Delaware River we gathered bushels of luscious blackberries.

Conkling also spoke of the town's early settlers, as he remembered them. He told the members how the people

went to church in their farm wagons, with kitchen chairs for seats and cushioned with homespun coverlets or blankets of their own spinning or weaving—others went on horseback or foot. (MVHS 1889)

The MVHS's president, Reverend Samuel Mills, spoke at the same dinner on a related theme. In his speech, he reached back to even earlier times. He imagined himself coming face to face

with the Minisink ancestors and all their "peculiarities of language, manner and dress." He found their homes "humble," their food "plain and wholesome," and their churches "modest and unadorned." Mills then reminded his audience that they owed their present good fortunes to "the labors, toils and sacrifices of their ancestors" (MVHS 1889).

Peter Wells was a MVHS member, attorney, and amateur poet from Milford, Pennsylvania. Speaking also at the 1889 banquet, he offered the members "character sketches" of the men and women who had first come to "the wilderness...this Minisink Region." He noted "their religious devotion to principle and their noble simplicity of life." Wells hoped that the MVHS, in gathering together recollections such as Conkling's, could become a living memorial to the "luminous" ancestors. But Wells also worried that against "the clear, steady light" of the ancestors' existence ("faithful, honest, heroic"), men such as himself and the other members were somehow "degenerate" (MVHS 1889).

Historians of the period, including T. Jackson Lears (1981: xi, 30) and Alan Trachtenberg (1982: 17), document similar "undercurrents of doubt" among Gilded Age intellectual, religious, and political leaders. All the more intriguing in an era known for its vast confidence, the fears of old stock northeastern elites—fears that they were becoming "effeminate, weak and immoral"—were especially pronounced in the face of working-class discontent and mounting social disorder. Lears contends that in the midst of unprecedented modernization, men and women of the upper classes turned to pre-industrial virtues as a source of moral regeneration.

The tone and content of the MVHS banquet oratory supports Lears' (1981:



xii) observations concerning the "backward-looking impulses" of Gilded Age elites. In their accounts, the members express ambivalence towards the modern landscape and long for an idealized past. These personal narratives, however, situated at the intersection of the self and a changing social order are embedded in more complex cultural processes than the historians' analyses would suggest.

### Constructing the Minisink

As stated in their 1889 constitution, the purpose of the MVHS was the study and preservation of "the local history of the Minisink Region, which ancient territory extended from the Delaware Water Gap on the south to Wurtsboro on the north." Rather than calling themselves the Port Jervis Historical Society or establishing an historical society for Orange County (there was none at this time), they took the name "Minisink" and appropriated its territory. In doing so, Port Jervis's leaders, its businessmen, bankers, politicians, and professionals, turned imaginatively to the past to reclaim a landscape that had long ceased to exist as a corporate or cultural entity. For many of the MVHS's members, the "ancient territory of the Minisink"—an unspoiled frontier peopled with savages and rugged, virtuous ancestors—would become a refuge from the factories, railroads, and immigrant strangers of the present.

During those first years, in scholarly papers and patriotic speeches, the members began to describe the Minisink as a physical place. They recreated the world of the ancestors and, in so doing, asserted the Minisink's significance as America's first frontier territory. In a speech commemorating

the bicentennial of the valley's settlement, President Mills (MVHS 1890) described the landscape and its inhabitants as follows:

It was no light undertaking at that time to come to a country such as this. It required a resolution and courage and energy now required to go to settle in Oregon or even Alaska. This whole valley for forty miles in either direction from this point was an unbroken wilderness through which the redman [sic] roamed unrestrained. No dwelling for civilized man was to be found in all its length and breadth and for many long miles in any direction—not even a log cabin—nothing but the wigwam in either direction.

This description of a landscape devoid of Europeans expresses the value members placed upon the antiquity of the Minisink settlements. Two features of the landscape, the Old Mine Road and the Pahaquarry Copper Mines, were believed to be associated with some of the earliest European activity in North America. As physical reminders of the ancestors' claims to the landscape, these sites figure prominently in the narratives of MVHS members and remain contested properties to this day (Bertland, Valence, and Woodling 1975: 37-42, 45; Fischler and Mueller 1991: 58; Kraft 1981: 25-27).

Its general contours established ("embracing portions of three states; containing two of the most beautiful valleys upon which the sun shines...traversed by two noble rivers"), the membership then began to fill in the details of the frontier landscape. Members who attended the first meetings heard some of the wealthiest men in Port Jervis describe the Minisink's roadways, churches, forts, and mills. Papers presented included: "The Old Machackemeck Church: Its Location, Appearance (external and internal), Customs at the

Meeting, etc."; "The Old Forts of the Valley"; "The Old Esopus Road"; "The Old Roads of Deerpark"; and "The Pahaquarry Copper Mines." Descriptions of the region's flora and fauna were also presented. J. M. Allerton, a local attorney, was asked to prepare "a map of the Minisink Valleys, as they were before the Revolutionary War, indicating, so far as possible, roads, houses etc." (MVHS 1889).

More than any other MVHS activity, however, the annual meeting, which was held for 11 summers in the nearby hamlet of Cuddebackville, New York, provided the members with the opportunity to collectively enact a representation that would otherwise have remained textual. The July event, because it commemorated local involvement in the Revolutionary War, enabled members to link the Minisink's past to events of national significance (Glassberg 1987). But, more importantly, it was also the occasion of a pilgrimage—a chance for the members and their families to "return" to the Minisink, if only for a day.

### **A Gathering in Cuddebackville**

The "gatherings," as the local newspapers called them, were held in Cuddebackville at Caudebec Park (dedicated in 1889 for this very purpose) located adjacent to Levi Cuddeback's Caudebec Hotel, approximately 1 mi south of the site of the first Dutch and Huguenot homesteads. "It is here," explained a local reporter, "within sight of the original settlement, surrounded by mementos of their departed ancestors, that the descendants of the Huguenots and Hollanders annually gather together and pay fitting tribute to the memories of their worthy sires" (P/JG 23 July 1890).

Six hundred people attended the first gathering. The second annual gathering (held July 22, 1890) marked the bicentennial of the Minisink's settlement as well as the anniversary of Battle of Minisink. The newspapers reported that 800 were present on this occasion. As at all the other gatherings, most of those attending were transported by train from Port Jervis to Cuddebackville. Carriages, wagons, and trains from other towns and villages "brought in additional hundreds" (P/JG 23 July 1890). It was a beautiful summer day. As noted by the Gazette's reporter, "the descendants of the Huguenots and Hollanders beheld the lands of their forefathers under the most favorable of circumstances."

While families and friends of the MVHS enjoyed picnic baskets or took their lunches on the Hotel Caudebec's veranda, the members held their business meeting. The last meeting's minutes were read, new members elected, and donations received. Listed among the gifts were a Dutch dictionary, old manuscripts, and a set of early surveyor's maps (P/JG 23 July 1890).

After lunch, the proceedings were called to order. The audience and speakers posed for group photographs, some of which remain in the MVHS's possession today. The president's opening speech was followed by several rounds of spontaneous as well as scheduled oratory. The speeches were interspersed with patriotic songs performed by Miss Marie Gumaer. An "enthusiastic" audience and "disciplined" choir provided periodic accompaniment (P/JG 23 July 1890). Of the many speeches heard that day, almost all recalled the Minisink ancestors. In a poem written for the occasion, Peter Wells presented the image of "brave and steady arms" beating back "the wolf

and hunger." His early Minisink was a cold and forbidding frontier:

The mountain barriers left and right  
No shelter from the savage foe;  
While through the forest swept the  
blast  
And deeply fell the winter snow.

The ancestors' suffering, however, is redeemed by the MVHS's recognition of the Minisink.

And this the spot—It smiles today—  
In breadth and length of happy homes,  
Through all the leagues of hill and  
vale—  
Which hold their ashes—and their  
sons  
The same sky bends above their graves  
that bent upon the Wilderness...  
(P/JG 23 July 1890)

For Reverend Mills, the MVHS's president, ties of blood to "the Minisink country" conferred special status. He also acknowledged the ancestors' sacrifices and spoke of the Battle of Minisink and the "deeds of valor and courage" witnessed there. But just as the Battle of Minisink was overlooked in the annals of American history, so too were the contributions of the early Dutch and Huguenot settlers. Noting that the Pilgrims of New England "never wanted for those to celebrate their deeds and virtues," Mills claimed for the Minisink forbears "equal honor and praise for all that they have done and endured in the cause of human liberty" (P/JG 23 July 1890).

Cornelius Cuddeback, a future president of MVHS, followed Mills onto the speakers' podium. For Cuddeback, a graduate of Yale and Columbia Law School, the problem of the ancestors' marginality could be resolved statistically. Whereas the original 17th-century settlement had contained only seven households, Cuddeback calcu-

lated that these individuals had generated over 50,000 living descendents by 1890. "A number nearly sufficient," he observed, "to form the requisite population for a state" (P/GJ July 23 1890).

Several songs and impromptu speeches later, a benediction was read, marking the close of the ceremonies. Members lingered for a time, visiting old friends and relatives, enjoying the remaining day. By 5:30, the trains were ready to leave. There would be several more annual gatherings before the century's end, but none so well attended.

As the textual record of a public event, the *Gazette* article documents the performative aspect of the MVHS's activities. In the narratives quoted in earlier sections of the present article, individuals tie social identity to place as they assert claims to versions of the local past. Collective enactments such as the Cuddebackville Gatherings powerfully dramatized such claims for the participants.

Cultural anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff (1986: 261) has studied present-day events wherein members of collectivities "show themselves to themselves." She concludes that in such definitional ceremonies or "showings," participants render visible "actual and desired truths about themselves and the significance of their existence." On July 22, 1890, the MVHS membership returned to and physically "occupied" the historical landscape they had imaginatively constructed as an alternative to Gilded Age Port Jervis. There, before an audience, the leaders of MVHS presented a reappraisal of the local past's relationship to the larger world, stressing the Minisink's primacy in the history of the nation state and reminding all those present of their ties through blood to participants in these historic events.

Through their frontier ancestors, Port Jervis's Gilded Age elites pursued claims to local hegemony at a time when such claims were threatened. Eight hundred friends and family members, through song, prayers, and bearing witness, participated in the performance. The community that the MVHS created that day in Cuddebackville shared a vision of the Minisink Territory and what it meant to be descended from or otherwise linked to the region's first European settlers. Having reformulated their relationship to the past, the members of the MVHS returned to their homes that evening, satisfied that their community's future was secure.

### **The Minisink Becomes an Acronym**

Today, a century after the MVHS's founding, a very different set of cultural meanings inform historical interpretation along the Upper Delaware. In 1962, Congress authorized construction of the Tocks Island Dam that would have inundated nearly all of the Minisink. Hundreds of people lost their homes and nearly 3,000 structures, many of them historic, were bulldozed by the Army Corps of Engineers before the project was finally shelved in 1976. The condemned properties were never returned to their owners and anti-government feelings still run high in the region (Bertland, Valence, and Woodling 1975: xii; *The New York Times* 4 September 1990).

The National Park Service now controls the land, encompassing approximately 40 mi of river valley. Because of the federal presence and the nexus of recent historic preservation laws accompanying it (the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the 1969 National Environmental Policy

Act, and the 1974 Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act), university-trained cultural resource management (CRM) professionals have joined local groups in the production of historical accounts. Although the Upper Delaware at present supports at least seven local organizations (including the MVHS, still based in Port Jervis) devoted to the interpretation and preservation of the region's past, a growing body of local historical and prehistoric knowledge is produced by Park Service personnel, federal, and state historic preservation specialists, and government contractors and consultants, who, in their language and practice, define themselves as members of a profession rather than residents of a particular locality.

The history of American professionalism in part explains why CRM professionals are so different from other producers of local historical knowledge. Scholars who have discussed the professionalization of historical practice in this country include Bender (1984, 1979), Russo (1988), and Van Tassel (1984). King, Hickman, and Berd (1977) approach the question more directly, outlining the epistemological roots of CRM in academic and local historical writing, historic preservation, urban planning, and processual archaeology. Their history of the field underscores the rapid development of CRM from this amalgam of disciplines.

The insights of Brown (1986: 40) on the role of discourse in the social construction of profession are also enlightening. "Language," she observes, "is a vital principal of both the social and epistemological aspects of profession, defining both professional community and professional knowledge." Indeed, what distinguishes late 20th-century CRM representations of the historical

landscape from those of the Gilded Age is the replacement of the Victorian discourse emphasizing patriotic, filial, nostalgic, or romantic sentiments with words connoting legal, bureaucratic, and scientific knowledge.

The discourse of CRM as it appears in a recent National Park Service document entitled "Comprehensive Preservation Planning-Historic Period Cultural Resources-Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, New York-New Jersey" (Louis Berger and Associates 1990) suggests how radically CRM representations of the Upper Delaware's past diverge from those produced in the late 19th century. In it, much of the landscape appropriated by the founders of MVHS as "the ancient territory" of the Minisink has been reborn as the "DEWA" (Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area). The early development of the region is now subsumed under the geographical referents "northeastern Pennsylvania" and "northwestern New Jersey." At times it is referred to simply as "the DEWA." Nowhere in the text does the place-name "Minisink" occur as a designation for the Upper Delaware Region. Several historical "contexts" or "themes" are identified, but "the frontier" is not among them. The significance of the region's many historical sites and structures are to be evaluated in reference to research questions related to the "contexts" and to a series of "property types" based upon "ongoing paradigms...developed for interpreting rural resources" in other communities (Louis Berger and Associates 1990: I/28).

The document illustrates how the discourse of CRM, through its metaphors and abstractions, allows practitioners to discuss a locality's past in ways that are understandable to historic preservation planners, academics,

and government bureaucrats. Working within government agencies or environmental consulting firms, CRM professionals have tailored their skills and their knowledge to satisfy the procedural requirements of bureaucratic organizations (Gerth and Mills 1974: 214-215). Following their legal mandate, they have been extraordinarily successful in protecting historical and prehistoric sites from destruction by inserting historic preservation concerns into the larger, national conservation agenda (King, Hickman, and Berg 1977). The price paid, however, is apparent in the language. Although the linguistic construction of detachment may be a product of all professions, the emotional distance expressed in many CRM documents is striking, especially in light of the subject matter—the particular pasts of places that are highly valued by individuals and by communities. The CRM representation of the Upper Delaware's past, because it retains the positivistic biases of several parent disciplines, presents a "generalized past" (Myers 1988: 263) that would not be recognizable to the 19th-century chroniclers of the Minisink frontier. As a means of understanding the past, CRM professionals posit interchangeable analytic units (i.e., "stages of development" or "types of societies") rather than the regionally specific and richly imagined histories of amateur historians.

CRM professionals typically work outside the academy, but many were trained in universities during the era of processual or "new" archaeology (Trigger 1986: 204) and of quantitative, economic, and social history (Higham 1983: 254-262; Russo 1988: 203). Thus CRM, as historical practice, carries within it the neo-evolutionary assumption that "behind the infinite variety

of cultural facts and specific historical situations is a finite number of general, historical processes" (Trigger 1989: 294). In the case of the Minisink, the details of the historical landscape have been suppressed so that larger, more ambitious theoretical concerns may be explored. Unlike the founders of MVHS, who, as we have seen, at times actually inhabited this landscape, CRM professionals, to be credible (i.e., neutral) social scientists or preservation planners, linguistically sever imaginative ties between themselves and the sites they write about and study. Thus CRM, while avoiding the antiquarian and often nativistic biases of the Gilded Age accounts, runs the risk of losing the cultural substance of history—the accumulation of memories and ideas about self and place that make local accounts so meaningful for the public.

### Conclusion

This article has posed questions concerning the meaning of local historical practice. Related issues have been pursued elsewhere: recent anthropological inquiry into the formation of imagined communities focuses upon the inscription of historical memory onto physical space by displaced peoples of the post-colonial era (Anderson 1991; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Myers 1992). American historians have studied historical societies, local historical writing, historical pageantry, and the "academization" of local historical knowledge (Bender 1984, 1979; Glassberg 1987; Higham 1984; Kamen 1987; Russo 1988). The ideological content of prehistoric and historical archaeological accounts in the United States, Britain, Scandinavia, and the Soviet Union is addressed in the archaeologi-

cal literature (Trigger 1989, 1985, 1984, 1980; McGuire 1989).

The present discussion has been limited to two loci of historical production: the frontier landscape of the Minisink as imaginatively constructed by the members of the Minisink Valley Historical Society during the late 19th century and, more briefly, bureaucratic and scientific valuations of the region's past by late 20th-century cultural resource management professionals. Several communities of contemporary non-professional historical practitioners also have found sources of meaning in the Upper Delaware's past. Forces such as the rapid suburbanization of this formerly rural area during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, the Corps of Engineers' land condemnations of the 1970s, and continuing federal intervention in matters of land use by the National Park Service may be causally related to high levels of historic preservation activism and participation in local historical organizations.

One recently founded historical society has taken as its headquarters a National Park "ghost town." The membership's periodic occupation of the village, emptied of its inhabitants by the Corps, raises questions concerning social identity and the construction of historical landscapes. Similar themes are apparent in the MVHS's annual "Mysteries of the Minisink" Symposium. Here, in a high school auditorium, local historians from New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania debate the relative antiquity of the 17th-century Pahaquarry Copper Mines and the historical significance of the Battle of Minisink with an intensity reminiscent of their turn-of-the-century predecessors. An ethnographic analysis of these and other socially situated instances of historical practice may shed light upon

the relationship between cultural processes and the manner in which local pasts are imagined.

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