

Where's Poughkeepsie?

Finding the Lost Spring

Many times this question has been asked and many times it has been answered. Wrongly. The Name Poughkeepsie is a mispronunciation of a Native American word which referred to the location of a specific spring of fresh water that was used by the first travelers to the area as a rest stop on the trail that ran south to North along the river.

Every town has a history and every name has an origin. In the United States most towns have common names. "Union" can be found all over as well as "Riverview", "Fairview" and "Centerville", but Poughkeepsie is unique. You might think the city of Poughkeepsie would be very proud of its name. It's written hundreds of thousands of times a day by people and machines.

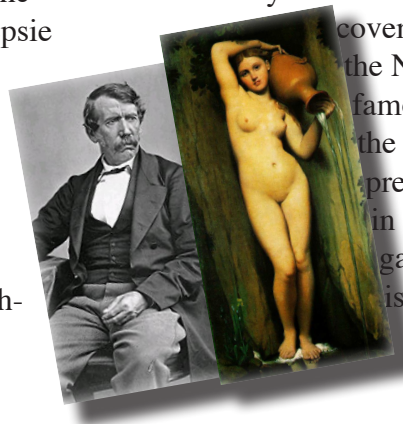
It is spelled out in signs, stationary and statutes and is seen by anyone in the city many times in a day. It's as present as Christmas musak on December 24. Outside the area it may now be the best-known attribute of the city. Many have heard of the place called Poughkeepsie but few may know where it is or what it is. Many Americans couldn't find it on a map either. Add to the list of those who don't know where Poughkeepsie is, the residents of that city on the Hudson. Because the real meaning of the name refers to a specific place that still exists and is no more that 10-foot square.

The specific place indicated by the name Poughkeepsie is not the city, in fact it's not even in the city at all, it's in the town of Poughkeepsie just south of the city line.

It is and has always been a peaceful spot from which a clear water spring has been issuing up longer than recorded history. In fact that spring, THE LOST SPRING OF POUGHKEEPSIE, was know to the native Americans who built a shelter out of the cat tail reeds or Uppuqui which grew there in the eternally wet area on the downhill side of a spring where fresh water and the materials to build a shelter were always present.

That is the place which is meant by the name Poughkeepsie. In the 1920s the staff of the Museum of the American Indian, suggested that Poughkeepsie or "uppuqui ipis ing" uppuqui pronounced oo-poo-kee and meaning "lodge covering," (the name of the cat-tail reed); ipis (little water); ing (meaning place) literally translated to "the reed-covered lodge by the little water-place."

What happened to the spring? That's what I set out to discover. I would not follow in the footsteps of the Famous explorer David Livingstone who searched in vain to discover the source of the Nile in the 19th century and was not heard from for six years until he, himself was discovered by a reporter from the New York Herald, their famous meeting generating the line "Dr. Livingstone, I presume." I would succeed in finding this spring that gave birth to the name that is so famous.



My journey started at the Health Department. Water – health Department was my thinking. A scholarly man there, thought he might know where the spring was and if it still existed. The Poughkeepsie health Department is on Main st. and has enough signs about communicable diseases to make you want to wash your hands when you leave. Standing next to a fold-up decontamination shower, he explained that a spring or “aquifer” is evidence of a fissure in the rock that leads to an area underground of fractured rock that holds water in the spaces between the stones. If the stones are very small, like grains of clay, not much water will be held but if the grains are large like coarse sand or pebbles then the volume of water held will be greater. When a spring dries up during drought conditions that spring may just be the outlet of recent rainwater. Dirty slush which has in solution all the detritus of modern life, anything which falls to the ground or has been dumped and gets rained on, flows underground and then erupts from the side of a hill, innocent looking but full of poison. On the other hand, when the spring flows consistently regardless of conditions on the surface it is likely that the source is an ancient one. Water that was deposited long before industry gave birth to the city on the Hudson, which took its name. Crisp, crystal-clear, clean, cool water, imprisoned deep below ground in saturated rock layers whose only outlet is a series of fractures in the overlying rock which, here and there lead upwards, flowing through gravel filters, picking up minerals and pushing to emerge as pure healthy refreshment full of minerals and a perfect choice to feed a weary traveler on a journey from Manhattan to settlements in the north.

In fact as I was later to find out, the spring at Poughkeepsie or “Pooghkepesingh” (as it was written in 1683) was almost certainly once bottled and sold as a health drink. Many are the testimonials from the 1870’s to the effects of Captain Loyd’s Crystal Mineral Spring Water, A.K.A. the spring at Poughkeepsie, \$5 a barrel.

Here are some of the testimonials:

“These curative waters:

‘The Crystal Mineral Spring is located one and a quarter miles from the Hudson River and is elevated two hundred feet above it. The water is transparent and brilliant, has no odor or taste.

The temperature varies only four or five degrees during the year and has a constant flow of six to eight gallons’

‘Three years ago the doctors gave her just one month to live. All the medicine they could give had no effect and she grew weaker. At last she gave up doctors and medicine and took nothing but Spring Water, now she is as well as anyone and looks better than she has in years.’

‘I was paralyzed with kidney complaint and dropsy – after taking it constantly for two weeks – I was entirely relieved of my kidney and dropsy troubles, James Wilson, No. 12 Perry st. 1877 ‘

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The next stop on my journey to find THE LOST SPRING OF POUGHKEEPSIE was just up the street from The Health Department, at the Dutchess County Historical Society where I found a lovely woman, Stephanie Mauri Director of the Dutchess County Historical Society who’s kind presence and graceful demeanor added to the character of the society’s office which is located in The Clinton House on Main street in which the famous first Governor (George Clinton) of New York never lived or worked. In a large room at a large desk, documents had been prepared for me. I then knew that Ms. Mauri would lead me to THE LOST SPRING OF POUGHKEEPSIE.

In those papers I found that the Dutch name of Rust Platz given to the site by two Dutch boys supplanted the native name and became the label on maps of the spring site. The trail that ran from Albany to Manhattan was known to them and was still being used by its native creators back then.

That old trail, part of a complex of trails called the great path was about two feet wide and six inches below grade, beaten down by countless pedestrians. Those boys, Johannes Van Kleeck (born 1680) and Myndert Van Den Bogaardt (born 1682) were exploring one day when they came upon some native travelers using the spot to rest. “Rust Platz” or Rest Place is how they described it to their parents when they returned, and the name stuck. Eventually the spring became known as Rust Platz and the old name “Poughkeepsie” became associated with the town to the North.

The origin of the city’s name was lost until more than one hundred years later, while looking through an old deed dated 1751 Mr. George Overocker found this description of the site of Rust Platz:

“Beginning at the east bank of Hudson River at a place formally called by the natives Apokeepsink where a small run of water empties into the Hudson River, which run of water was known by the name of Rest Place Creek.”

From that piece of information the spring was again found, just east of the rural cemetery and the south road.

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A marker that once stood on South Road indicating the general vicinity was stolen back in the 70’s, around the time that criminal feet picking became associated with the name of the Lost Spring and the city in the movie *The French Connection*. Old



maps do not indicate the exact location and the best clue was a valley shown on some maps descending towards rte 9. With copies of those maps and a camera I parked at the Holiday Inn Express and walked along Route 9 towards the area on the map. My first clue was a newly built complex of

bright yellow town houses with a big sign proclaiming “Spring Manor.” I was close and I knew it. The

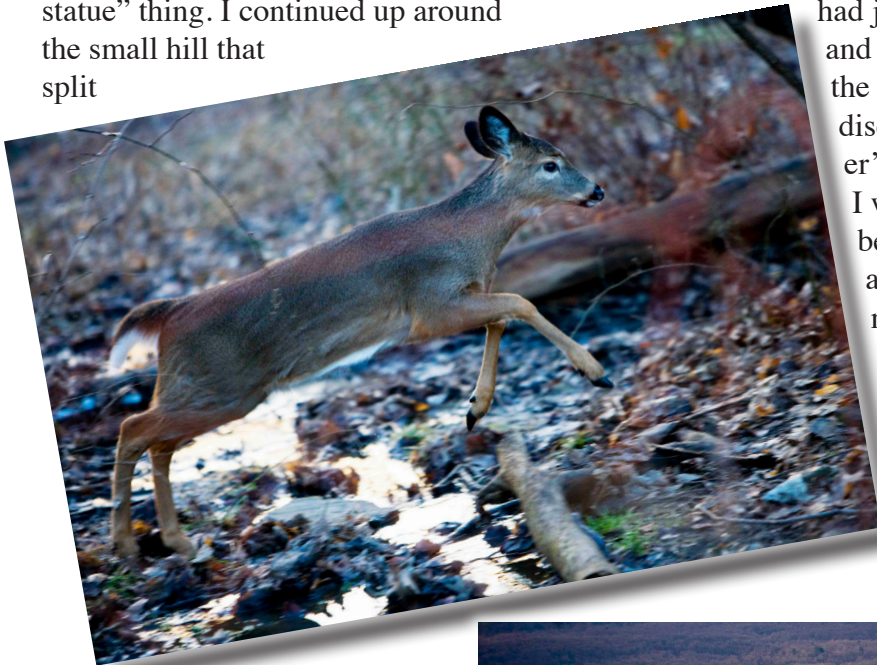
cars and trucks sped by close enough to keep me off balance as I walked on the snow piled up from the storm of New Years Eve 2008. Then as I continued further down Route 9 I came to a piece of undeveloped land with a small stream and cat-tail reeds growing wild. This was it, in the snow I could clearly see the stream coming from somewhere up the hill. The cattails I saw must be descendants of the very plants used to build the first shelter here in recorded history.



I found a gap in the fence and no signs warning me away as I tramped down from the road through the foot deep snow into a clearing. Even in the bitterly cold weather

the stream was not frozen over and flowed past my boots as I followed it uphill. As I passed some young trees I found a large flat area of grass clumps and frozen mud about one quarter acre large.

There the stream spread out just below a small hill surrounded by running water on both sides. It was then that I noticed that I was not alone. Although I was only 200 feet from the road and in sight of a line of small houses I was being watched by a group of 10 deer that were doing their “I’m a statue” thing. I continued up around the small hill that split



When I returned a few days later the snow was mostly gone and things had warmed up. It was then that I met Linda Nolen. She had just been visiting her mother Mavis, a resident who lives on a waitresses pension. Having worked all her life in restaurants since the age of 16, Mavis had joined the waitress union in California and is now retired and living only feet from the most important historical site in town. I discussed the spring just behind her mother’s apartment and that’s when she said, “I wonder if they know about the spring, because they’re getting ready to build another section right on that spot.” In the next report, I’ll check on whether or not there are any proposed developments at the site and test the water for purity and contaminants. I’ll also give directions and take suggestions for monuments. Is the spring still pristine? Are the waters curative? Does it matter?

the stream and began to see another housing development and parking lot in the distance. This one was a 1970’s era brick apartment building. The two streams joined up again above the hill and Just as I Approached the parking lot I found it. Issuing forth through half a plastic culvert pipe and covered in brush was the source of the lost Spring of Poughkeepsie. Clear and brilliant, just like the claims of Captain Loyd, and about six to eight gallons a minute, less than 20 feet from a parking lot. I looked around for a sign, something to tell me that I had arrived, but only its placement, color and volume gave away this historic spring.

