

# Watertown Peck Finds No Peck

By JANICE BATTISTA

WATERTOWN—Levi Peck is not and never was buried in the cellar of an 18th-century farmhouse on Nova Scotia Hill Road.

State Archaeologist Nicholas F. Bellantoni made that determination last Friday after digging three feet beneath an ancient tombstone long embedded in the basement. His ruling came as a relief to two couples who recently purchased the 249-year-old house, set on 23 acres across from Veteran's Park.

"He's not here," the archaeologist, who was assisted by a small team of volunteers, said at the end of the day-

*Continued on Page Two*

THE LITCHFIELD COUNTY TIMES

## Watertown Basement Found Not to Be Peck's Resting Place

*Continued from Page One*

long excavation *cum media circus*.

The tombstone had been embedded in the cement floor, inside a tiny crypt-like nook made of brick and containing two small windows, presumably for viewing the stone. A relative of the former owners, Alice and Joseph Zuraitis, alerted the town historian, Florence Crowell, that an old farmhand was believed to have been buried in the basement. Mrs. Crowell notified town officials, and the search for Levi Peck began.

The new owners, Pedro and Cristina Francisco of Prospect and Armando and Dunia Rodrigues of Naugatuck, contacted Mr. Bellantoni about three weeks ago

---

*'I'm beginning to feel  
that possibly the family,  
like a lot of other families,  
had their own private  
burial ground.'*

—Florence Crowell,  
Watertown historian

---

to help solve the mystery so they can proceed with plans to demolish the dilapidated house and build as many as a dozen new homes on the property.

Mr. Bellantoni concluded that the earth beneath the marker consisted of glacial till and was too hard-packed to ever have been dug for a grave. He and Phil Reppert, a geologist from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, then scanned the entire floor with a high-tech, ground-penetrating radar device and found no evidence of a burial elsewhere in the basement.

The archaeologist said he plans to write a letter to the town recommending that there is no reason the subdivision project should not proceed.

The owners have donated the tombstone to the Watertown Historical Society Museum on DeForest Street. The museum is open Wednesdays from 2 to 4 p.m. or by appointment.

Ruth Shapleigh-Brown, director of the Manchester-based Connecticut Gravestone Network, inspected the marble marker and concluded that it looked like a "throwaway" stone that never had been exposed to nature's elements. The lettering is still sharp and crisp and the stone itself has not "sugared" the way it would have if it had been outdoors in a cemetery, she said.

The inscription on the stone reads "Mr. Levi Peck died May 26th 1802. Aged 55 years." The town historian's research into the life of the man has found that he would have been just shy of his 53d birthday at the time of his death.

"If he was 53 years old when he died, that's all the more reason why this would have been a throwaway stone," Ms. Shapleigh-Brown remarked. Perhaps a new stone, bearing the correct age at death, was made and used to mark the grave. Why or how the stone came to rest in the Watertown house also remains part of the mystery, although it wasn't uncommon for people to keep tombstones as a memento if a new marker was placed on a grave, or as a novelty if found in a field. Today, removing an ancient stone from a burial site is illegal.

"I'm beginning to feel that possibly the family, like a lot of other families, had their own private burial ground," said Mrs. Crowell, who plans to continue her research.

While Levi Peck's burial site remains a mystery, other tidbits about his life can be gleaned from history books and ancient documents.<sup>3</sup>

Birth records in Litchfield show he was born in that town on June 23, 1748, the sixth of eight children born to Thomas and Sarah Peck. A soldier in the Revolutionary War, he was wounded in the shoulder in Wilton, according to Alain White's 1920 "History of Litchfield."

The Record of Service of Connecticut Men in the War of the Revolution lists Levi Peck as a private in the 1st Regiment, 4th Company, under Capt. David Welch of Litchfield, who later became a major. The regiment was raised

on the first call for troops by the legislature, and the recruitment took place in April and May 1775. The tome lists Levi Peck's date of discharge as Sept. 2, 1775.

In that era, short military stints were common, with some lasting just six weeks. But all able-bodied men were required to be enrolled in the militia. It was in that capacity that Levi Peck was among the men who rushed to fight the British during Gen. William Tryon's raid on Danbury.

On April 25, 1777, two dozen ships had landed at a place between Fairfield and Norwalk called Compo, now in Westport. The troops, numbering more than 2,000, marched 23 miles without resistance to Danbury, where they raided the store houses and set the town on fire. The militia battled the formidable British force as the troops marched back to Compo. A battle in Ridgefield on April 27 claimed the life of Gen. David Wooster of the militia.

The rebels resisted the British the following day in Wilton at a bridge that spanned the Norwalk River in the town's center, according to a historical account in the Wilton library. "The attempt to hold the bridge was made by militia from the north woods," a historian penned long ago. "This would be the 6th brigade from Litchfield County." Its commander was Gen. Oliver Wolcott.

Although Wolcott apparently was not involved in the raid, his son, Oliver, then

*'There are so many anonymous people in history. They didn't have Social Security cards....'*

—Catherine Fields,  
Litchfield Historical Society

17, "armed himself and set out, at once," for Danbury, "with his mother's charge, 'to conduct like a good soldier,'" White's history reveals.

Mrs. Crowell learned that for 10 years Levi Peck owned a tract of land where the towns of Watertown, Morris and Bethlehem meet near Route 63. He sold the property, which apparently was 16 acres, in 1797 to an Ebenezer Benton Jr.

The June 2, 1802, edition of the weekly Litchfield Monitor briefly mentions that Levi Peck died at South Farms, which is now the town of Morris, on May 26, 1802, "of a consumption." The newspaper listed his age as 56.

Catherine Fields, director of the Litchfield Historical Society, could find no listing of Levi Peck in any of the town's early cemeteries. His name does not appear in The Hale Cemetery Listings, a national listing created in 1934, or in a registry of Revolutionary War soldiers buried in Litchfield County. The records in that era just weren't as meticulously maintained as they are today, Ms. Fields said.

"The problem is there are so many anonymous people in history. They didn't have Social Security cards or credit cards," the Litchfield Historical Society director said. "You get to know the wealthy people, but finding out about the common people is hard."

Ms. Fields did, however, find an entry in an obscure typescript called "Grandma Cowles Records," which contains genealogical information on Morris. The document indicates that Levi Peck had five children with his first wife, Rachel Harrison. After she died, he married Anna Jenks, and they too, had five children. According to Grandma Cowles, Peck paid off a debt at Col. Benjamin Tallmadge's general store in Litchfield by having one of his daughters work there "for 10 weeks and two days."

Mrs. Crowell obtained an inventory of Levi Peck's estate at the Connecticut State Library in Hartford. The document, dated June 29, 1802, placed the value of his possessions at the time of death at \$209.22. Among his worldly goods were one yoke of oxen, two cows, one calf, a sow and three pigs, one mare, two cider barrels, two meat barrels, a half barrel of vinegar, two table cloths, a pair of boots, candlesticks, a looking glass, a bed quilt, an oak pail, a chest of drawers, a Bible and a psalm book.

The probate records, which are also on microfilm in the Litchfield probate court, also show that he apparently did have a decent burial—somewhere. Among the funeral expenses, which totaled \$32.42, were \$2.42 for a coffin and 50 cents for "ringing of the bell at the burial."