

New Hope Gazette
April 2, 1998

GEOLOGY, always the prime mover at Ingham Spring

Limestone layer found only in this part of Bucks County

By EVE GELMAN

Transcription note: Parts of the original article were lost when the article was photocopied. These are indicated by ellipses.

With Solebury Township considering the purchase of land at Ingham Spring at Route 202 and Lower Mountain Road, Eve Gelman has checked into the history of the area.

Any history of Ingham Spring must begin with an understanding of the unique geology of this natural resource.

According to the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's 1995 master plan of Ingham Spring:

"When comparing the history of the site with its geology, the statement was made by an investigating geologist that he had never before seen a site where the geology had been the prime mover in its uses throughout history."

Ingham Spring exists because of this geology, which consists of layers of limestone and rock sandwiched between red shale that heaved and shifted millions of years ago. Combined with erosion of the shale, this has resulted in exposed areas of the limestone layer found only in this part of Central Bucks County. Limestone dissolves very easily which explains the prevalence in this area of

limestone caves, sink holes and springs.

Ingham spring is believed to be the point where much of the water that flows underground through this area is discharged at a rate of 3 million gallons a day into the Aquetong Lake, forming the headwater of the Aquetong Creek that flows downstream where it meets the Delaware River at New Hope.

Before 1700, the Lenni Lenape Indian tribe occupied the area for perhaps hundreds of years. They lived in a village at the springs they called "Achewe-tonk," loosely translated as a "spring in the bushes," which the early white settlers changed to "Aquetong." The natives also referred to this hallowed ground as the "Great Spring."

The Lenape venerated the spring, somehow aware of the unique geology. They believed the spring was connected by an underground river to another unique natural formation three miles away near Holicong, a hole in the earth which they called the "Conkey Hole."

Legend has it that some native hunters chased a deer into the Conkey Hole and the deer emerged a short time later, unharmed, at Aquetong

spring. Even the early farmers in the area claimed that chaff dropped down the Holicong hole would come up at the Aquetong spring.

In 1926, for his master's thesis at the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Walter Lapp performed an experiment, dumping 100 pounds of Epsom salt into the hole at Holicong and tested the water every few minutes at Ingham spring for evidence of the magnesium sulfate. None was found.

Chief Tedyuscong, "King of the Delawares," significant as the last and one of the ablest of the Lenape leaders, who made a stand to repudiate the land claimed through the "Walking Purchase", was born and spent much of his youth at Aquetong spring.

After white settlers began to move in, fatal smallpox broke out among the natives in the village of the spring. Visits from other Lenape natives, not knowing it was infectious, spread the disease. Believing that the white man infected the waters to harm the natives, the Lenape abandoned the village.

When the English king, Charles II, granted the Province of Pennsylvania by Royal Charter to William

Penn in 1681, Penn immediately set out to survey and divide the land. The "Great Treaty" of 1683, one of the first land sales between Penn and the Lenape, did not specifically include land above Wrightstown.

Yet, in the settlers' push for more land, Penn began to grant land around 1700 that the Lenape did not formally release until 1718.

Included were three tracts granted by Penn in 1701, one tract to his secretary, James Logan, for 600 acres surrounding Aquetong Spring. The other was a grant to Robert Heath of two 500-acre parcels, fronting the Delaware River and extending back to the Great Spring tract, encompassing what is now New Hope. The southern tract to be known as the Mill tract, was blessed with the Aquetong Creek running through.

The Heath patent was granted with the condition that if Heath would, in one year's time, build a flour grist mill on the stream, he would be assured exclusive water rights to run the grist mill. Before this, people would have to travel to mills on the Neshaminy or Pennypack to grind their flour. So this first mill of New Hope, built in 1707, became a thriving enterprise and was the start of the development that grew New Hope into one of the most thriving industrial and commercial centers of the county until well into the 19th century.

The Heath mill was followed by construction of a

fulling mill for woolen cloth in 1712. Benjamin Canby built a forge and the first sawmill around 1740. By 1745, four mills flourished on the Aquetong stream

In 1747, James Logan granted 400 acres, containing the spring, to Jonathan Ingham, using his system of "Loganian Rights," ground rents placed in the deed that would assure him and his Loganian Library Company of Philadelphia an annual income in perpetuity. The rent amounted to about 31 cents per acre, a very fair price, until 1860, at which time it was decided that the rent was to be reappraised.

The Inghams, an accom-
Continued on page 16

Because of its mills, Solebury was a large community

Continued from page 15
plished and distinguished family owned the property for 113 years, at this time known at Ingham Springs.

A son, Dr. Jonathan Ingham, farmed and operated a fulling mill on the stream. A physician during the Revolutionary war, he cared for Washington's troops before the Delaware crossing. He caught yellow fever and soon died.

His son Samuel born on the New Hope farm in 1779, became not only the most prominent member of their family but the most prominent that Solebury ever produced. After his father's death, he left his studies and was indentured to learn the

paper making business at the Pennypack mill.

At 21, he returned home to operate the farm and fulling mill and built the first paper mill in the county. The paper from the Ingham Spring Paper Mill, made by hand at first, was hauled to Philadelphia to be used for the printing of some of the early Bucks County newspapers.

Becoming interested in politics, he served in the Pennsylvania General Assembly from 1805-7 then served in Congress from 1812-29, taking a break between to serve as Secretary of the Commonwealth. Recognized as an authority in banking and tariffs, Ingham served President Andrew Jackson as Secretary of the Treasury until he resigned because of an argument with the president and ensuing scandal.

Samuel returned to his home, the Ingham house, in 1831, and quickly became involved with the coal industry, which led him to back the canal project. He was influential in the decision to build the crossover bridge to New Jersey from New Hope instead of up the river.

In 1849, he sold 75 acres of land to Horatio Beaumont. Beaumont opened a zoo with native animals such as buffalo, deer, and raccoons at the beginning of the period when Ingham Springs became a destination for tourists and recreation.

In the meanwhile, much commercial activity was happening on the Aquetong

stream on the Mill tract. In 1828, William Maris, local merchant and engineer, bought the original Heath mill, using the water to run his factory forfeiting the exclusive right to the water for grinding. A boom of mill construction resulted further downstream. Samuel Ingham also modernized his paper mill with the Fourdrinier machine. It was the first mill in the state to use one. Ingham ran this mill until he died in 1860.

Very likely the need for more water power for the additional mills spurred the construction by 1870 of the longer Ingham dam of today. The remains of smaller dams and canals needed to divert water and control it for the earlier mills were likely destroyed with the formation of the lake. The population of Solebury reached its height around 1870 of almost 2,800. It was one of the largest communities in the county at that time.

Andrew Beaumont bought 35 acres from his brother, Horatio, and formed the Beaumont Deer Park Association for propagation of game and fish. The park soon became popular grounds for schools, such as The Solebury School, and county literary societies to hold picnics, parties, and conventions with as many as 3,500 in attendance.

The Ingham estate sold the spring and surrounding property to Dr. Richard V. Mattison in 1867. Two men from Philadelphia, James Thompson and H.C. Tagg,

leased a small area near the spillway of the spring for a fish hatchery, called the T&T Hatchery.

Fish breeding was becoming very popular in the county and large numbers of people paid 25 cents to see the ponds and spawning beds with as many as 100,000 shad, 70,000 brook trout, 9,000 salmon and 100 terrapin turtles that were raised for a few years. Finally, the hatchery fad died out but some of the brook trout escaped into the lake and grew almost too large to fish. Dr. Mattison was very interested when the Bucks County Fish, Game and Forestry Association . . . contract did not result in a sale at the time.

The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints purchased the 75-acre Deer Park parcel in 1921 for \$5,000 and a deed extinguishing the Loganian rent system was granted in 1923. The church is still the owners of the site.

By 1936, Dr. Perry and Helen Bond bought the 60-acre Ingham spring site from the Mattison estate for \$11,500. They found it in great disrepair with remnants of enterprises from an ice cream stand and water bottling facility to a pottery kiln, a place for pleasure boats and a motor launch, anything that the chain of tenants could do to pay the rent.

Having the means and the motivation, the Bonds cleaned up the property, renovated the house and

preserved the natural beauty of the lake and dam over the next 39 years. A friend gave them a pair of Canada geese, which they kept on their property, turning the site into a breeding ground for the geese.

Reportedly, fishing groups were interested in the property as far back as the 1930s and the state became interested enough to begin to inquire about a possible

Perhaps this is what led Solebury Supervisor William Warden, a staunch opponent of a state hatchery at the site, to be quote in a local newspaper in 1966 as saying, "The discussion about . . . once each year."

Although the state wanted to establish a fish hatchery and Governor William Scranton approved the purchase in 1966, the township always opposed the plan. More important, the Bonds refused to sell, remaining firm against state threats to condemn the land.

The state did purchase the 22 acres adjacent to the Bonds' site in 1966 for \$45,000, stating that the purchase was part of their master plan to acquire the entire 47 acres.

The Bonds sold their land to Helen's brother, Dr. Judy, in 1975 who maintained it in its natural state.

When the Judy estate put the property on the market in the early 1990s, the Fish and Boat Commission jumped at it and applied for federal assistance.

The commission called it a "once in a lifetime

acquisition of opportunity of which acquisition for public use in posterity may never again be possible.” It urged the federal government to move quickly to approve the funds, time being so short that the commission could not fully prepare a complete development plan for the site. But it did envision the property as a central location for KARE, the Keystone Aquatic Resources Education program, its water safety and boating program, and a public fishing opportunity.

The acquisition was completed by June 1993 for a total cost of \$1.1 million, with the Federal share of \$825,000 and the state . . . authorization by the General Assembly.

Very quickly, the commission realized the site was not appropriate for the programs it envisioned. Internal written communications reveal that by 1995 the fishing experts at the commission recommended against developing the site as a trout culture station and against breaching the dam to return the site to a trout stream because the volume of water from the spring was not enough to promote a successful stream. In addition, the

Continued on page 26

Ingham Spring a sacred site

Continued from page 16
125 years of silt build-up at the lake bottom and the presence of large snapping

turtles, meant the site could not be used for the water safety or boating programs.

That left the KARE program, which would need a large parking lot, sewer and indoor facilities, piers, trails, fishing sites, and classroom space to develop, but because of budget cuts never got off the ground. So the commission began to negotiate with Solebury Township to purchase the site but talks broke down for a time over who would assume liability for the dam.

Talks have resumed this year and, in lieu of making a presentation to the commissioners in April, the supervisors will work with the executive director of the commission to make a presentation at the commissioners’ meeting in July to plead their case for acquisition of the site.

The bottom line is whether the township will be able to come up with the funds that the state requires as part of its federal funding package.

According to Bruce McNaught, executive director of the Bucks County Audubon Society, which is the KARE program facilitator in Eastern Pennsylvania, because Ingham Spring has been listed as a “geologically significant site” by Bucks County’s natural resource plan and has been given other recognition, it may well qualify for county open space funds, state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and bond money through Keystone grants, and other creative financing.

A developer, Penn’s Grant, has recently entered the picture quietly negotiating with the church to lease a part of the Deer Park property for a senior housing development. The group would have the means available to offer funds for development and programs at Ingham Spring— if the change in the zoning district needed for the proposed plan is passed as well as permission granted to cross public lands for sewer hookup and road access. Perhaps an attractive proposal for whoever will own the site.

Not attractive to Solebury resident, Joyce Overpeck who is an advocate of the township’s owning the entire site without allowing development of it. She presented the supervisors with a chapter on Solebury Township from the W.W.H. Davis book “A History of Bucks County,” at their last meeting. She said that all parents should read this history of Solebury to their children. After the meeting, Mrs. Overpeck explained,

“Ingham Spring is our history. It should belong to the township. My feeling is that the township should own Ingham Spring, Ingham Lake and the Ingham house, and repair the dam. I think the supervisors should know the history of our township and use our limited funds to purchase the most historically significant land.”

It may be too soon to judge who will own Ingham Spring in the end. It began with the Lenape inhabitants and

recently the native presence made itself felt again. Chief Bill Thompson and wife Diane, who are elders of the Lenape Nation of Eastern Pennsylvania, Mary Bye, and other local Lenapes started to perform ceremonies in memory of their ancestors at the spring in 1992.

The first year they planted their sacred tree, the red cedar, at the head of the spring. It was narrowly missed that winter when a huge black walnut tree

crashed in its direction. They also danced the ancient Lenape Friendship Dance around a grandfather tree that year.

The natives came back twice more to perform ceremonies, in 1994 and 1995, and to plant more trees, a White Pine, a Norway Spruce. Chief Thompson said that Mary Bye initiated the ceremonies at the spring and donated the red cedar because she was interested in having the spring preserved.

Diane Thompson said the spring is still a "sacred spot" for the Lenape.

"We built a prayer fire, which is a fire built by hand," said Chief Thompson, describing the ceremony. "We offered the tobacco. Smoke carried our voices to the Creator to bless the place and protect it."

Transcribed by Suzanne Crilley

Photo that accompanied the article is unavailable, but here is the caption:

Lenape ritual

Chief Bill Thompson leads ceremonies at Ingham Spring with Native Americans in 1992. Indians lived near the spring long before Europeans colonized the area.