

Washington Spring Van Saun Park, 216 Forest Avenue, Paramus

History: From reedy marshes only a few feet above sea level along the Hackensack River, Cherry Hill in River Edge suddenly rises 113 feet in elevation, offering a commanding view of the countryside for many miles around. In order to attract suburban buyers, the old name of Brower's Hill was changed when the railroad came to the neighborhood in 1873. The shallow swale (where Van Saun Park is now found) is bounded east by Cherry Hill and west by "the hill commonly called the Cacel Rugh at the road [now Howland Avenue] which leads from the New Bridge to Sluckup." Referring to the small woods that once grew hereabout, Cacel Rugh or *Kachgel Ruygte* means "stove-kindling ridge."

Several living springs feed brooks that descend the narrow vale between ridges, concentrating in Van Saun Mill Pond before contributing their commingled waters to Cole's Brook and finally the Hackensack. This hollow between the hills was anciently known as Sluckup, but changed to the more poetic Spring Valley in 1832. *Sluckup* has resisted attempts at interpretation – it was even humorously suggested that it earned its name when a cow "slucked up" a farmer's linen coat from a fence. The Bantas, one of the first families to farm this valley of springs, hailed from Friesland on the North Sea. The Frisian language is Scandinavian in origin, more closely resembling Old English than Dutch. The Old Norse had a word, *slakki* (*slack*, in English) to describe "a small valley or boggy hollow."

Long ago, beasts of the forest that drew near to drink the cool spring brook attracted predators. A wolf pit was located east of Spring Valley Road, near the confluence of the upper branches of the Mill Brook, and within the present confines of Van Saun Park. The last panther in the wild was seen crossing the valley, heading for the Palisades, in 1775.

Many years ago, a beautiful slate "banner-stone" was found on the Lozier farm on Cherry Hill, River Edge. It is now known that such winged stones were used as counterweights on spear-throwers. The spear-thrower or *atlatl* was a weighted holder that acted like an extension of the human arm, allowing the hunter to throw a spear with enough velocity to pierce the tough hides of Ice Age fauna. The Cherry Hill banner-stone is probably about nine thousand years old.

The land that is now Van Saun Park was part of three hundred acres "called Coovange the Indian's land," extending between the Saddle and Hackensack rivers, that was acquired by Albert Sabersco (Zabriskie) in September 1686. Sachem Coovange and his relations – who belonged to an extended family called the Tappans – resided on the banks of the spring brook. Coovange participated in land sales in the Hackensack Valley from the Saddle River east to the Tiene Kill, and from New Bridge north to Tappan. In October 1695, Albert Zabriskie sold 224 acres extending west from the Hackensack River to the Sprout Brook, to a boatman from New York City named Jacob Van Saun. He and his wife, Jannetie Lucas, had a son named Jacob, born in April 1684, who married Rachel Bogert at Hackensack in August 1705. It was this son that first settled on the west bank of the Hackensack River.

Exactly when one of the Van Sauns built a stone dam in the hollow below the conjunction of several spring brooks and erected a grist mill here is unrecorded, but on 1 May 1750, neighbor Jan Banta devised "all the rest of my land lying on the west side of a run of water called the Muelekel [Mill Creek]" to his son Cornelius Banta. By the time of the Revolution, the road to

Sluckup (now Howland Ave) ran upon the division line between Jacob Van Saun's farm to the south and son-in-law Christian Dederer's farm to the north, heading west from Kinderkamack Road over the crest of Brower's Hill, then descending into the dell where it crossed Van Saun Mill-Pond on a crude wooden bridge over the mill dam. Early in the Revolution, Cornelius and Isaac Van Saun were arrested on false report that they had sold flour to British troops, when apparently it had been confiscated from their mill without compensation.

On 22 September 1778, six thousand British and Hessian soldiers waded ashore at Paulus Hook and swiftly advanced to New Bridge, where they threw up earthworks on Brower's Hill to secure the left flank of a defensive line strung across the peninsula. According to Abram D. Banta, the Bergen Militia under Captain Outwater were "watching to counteract the movement of the enemy near New Bridge and Schrawlenberg, seeking opportunities for foraging incursions, and to attack the fort on Brower's Hill, now New Bridge." Abram Banta and "his company marched within three or four hundred yards when the enemy fired cannon upon them" and General Wayne, on account of the inequality of his force, retreated to where his brigade remained three or four weeks. It was likely during this brief encounter that a cannonball struck the west hill of the Van Saun Mill-Pond; it was dug out of the earth and displayed in the mill until about 1888.

An old bridge that carried what is now Howland Avenue over the Millpond was long the source of legends. Cornelius H. Banta (1819-1904) recalled the story that seventeen Continental soldiers standing guard at Spook Bridge were murdered by Tories that gave them poisoned cider. His grandfather (also named Cornelius), when only a boy, was said to have seen "the frozen bodies of these unfortunate men beside the dead embers of their campfire." He claimed to have witnessed their burial "on the westerly slope of Brower's Hill" where a "rough board then marked the spot, but the plough has long furrowed the ground over the last resting place and all traces of it have long since disappeared [in 1906]." After the murders, it was said "that no horse would cross that brook because the spirits of the murdered soldiers hovered around the spot!" Cornelius Banta, who "believed in spirits and ghosts as firmly as did his Dutch ancestors," assured his listeners in 1906 "that he had tried to cross it one night many years ago, but his horse became frightened and refused to cross, and he was compelled to go home through a lane farther to the north."

During September 1780, Continental soldiers encamped in the fields along Kinderkamack Road from New Bridge northward towards Westwood. Hendrick Banta, Cornelius' great-grandfather, owned a cider mill at Steenraupie (River Edge) and sold a barrel of cider to the troops "every other day." Cornelius' grandfather, then fourteen years old, "saugh Washington three times on his hors." It was supposedly on one of these trips through the neighborhood that Washington and his charger stopped to quench their thirst at the spring that now bears his name.

The *Tax Ratables for New Barbadoes Precinct* identified Cornelius Van Saun as the owner of a gristmill from September 1779 through at least 1797. He is not listed as the owner in September 1802, having died that year; a deed then referred to "the mill lot belonging to Luke Van Saun." A tax list for 1820 identifies Nicholas Romine as owner of a gristmill and sawmill at that location.

Nicholas Romine died in October 1821, leaving his wife Sally with "full and quiet possession" of his real and personal estate for so long as she remained his widow, after which it was to be divided equally among his three sons: Jacob, Nicholas and Abraham. In May 1827, Nicholas' executors sold "his homestead farm at Sluckup with house, Barn, Grist Mill, saw mill and improvements" situated on the south side of the road from Stone Arabia (Steenrapie) to Sluckup, to William I. Ackerman for \$3,000. William Ackerman and his wife Rachel sold the same property (62 acres) to Peter C. Debaun and Albert C. Debaun of Harrington Township in October 1831. Peter Debaun immediately sold his half-interest to his brother Albert for \$600. Albert died

in August 1853, bequeathing his farm and personal property to his wife and (after her demise or remarriage) to his daughter Marie, wife of John M. Terhune. Neither his will nor an inventory made of his possessions makes any reference to a grist or sawmill, so it is possible that he disposed of same, either by lease or sale, before his death. In any event, at some time shortly before or after Albert's Debaun's death, the mill property came into the possession of Jacob Henry Van Saun.

The G. H. Corey Map of 1861 shows "J. H. Van Saun" living next to the grist and sawmill. The old mill did not operate many more years, but closed down during the Civil War; by 1876 the machinery had been mostly removed. By 1902, Jacob H. Van Saun's icehouse stood at the outlet of the pond. According to a report in *The Bergen County Democrat*, J. H. Van Saun & Company gathered a nine-inch cut of ice from Spring Lake at Spring Valley on 15 February 1906. The commercial ice industry declined with the advances the manufacture of man-made ice and the spread of home refrigeration.

In the Great Flood of 9-10 October 1903, Herbert Howland, Midland Township clerk, was nearly drowned in his attempt to save the Howland Avenue Bridge by dislodging the accumulation of debris in the swollen stream. In April 1904, Freeholder A. Z. Bogert of River Edge exhibited plans for the proposed Howland Avenue Bridge to be built above the recent flood line. The Riverside Borough Council agreed to raise its road grade in conformity with the change. The contract to install the bridge was then awarded to F. R. Long for \$695.

Site Size: Washington Spring is approximately ½acre.