

The Colonie Historical Oracle

Quarterly Newsletter of the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie

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April-June 2015

How Did Wolf Road Get Its Name?



Submitted by Mark T. Bodnar, President

One of the main thoroughfares in the Town of Colonie is **Wolf Road**. Now a four lane highway connecting Central Avenue with Albany Shaker Road, known predominantly as the location of the Colonie Center shopping mall, over the years Wolf Road has become a high-traffic road with two exits off the Northway. Travelers can easily access the Albany County International Airport, in addition to a plethora of hotels, restaurants and numerous business enterprises. How did this dirt road from long ago, cutting through farm fields and livestock grazing land, be assigned the name **Wolf Road**?

No, it wasn't because there was a pack of wolves in the vicinity, although that is probably the most common guess. The answer is, really, simple: Wolf Road is named for John Kemp. Period.

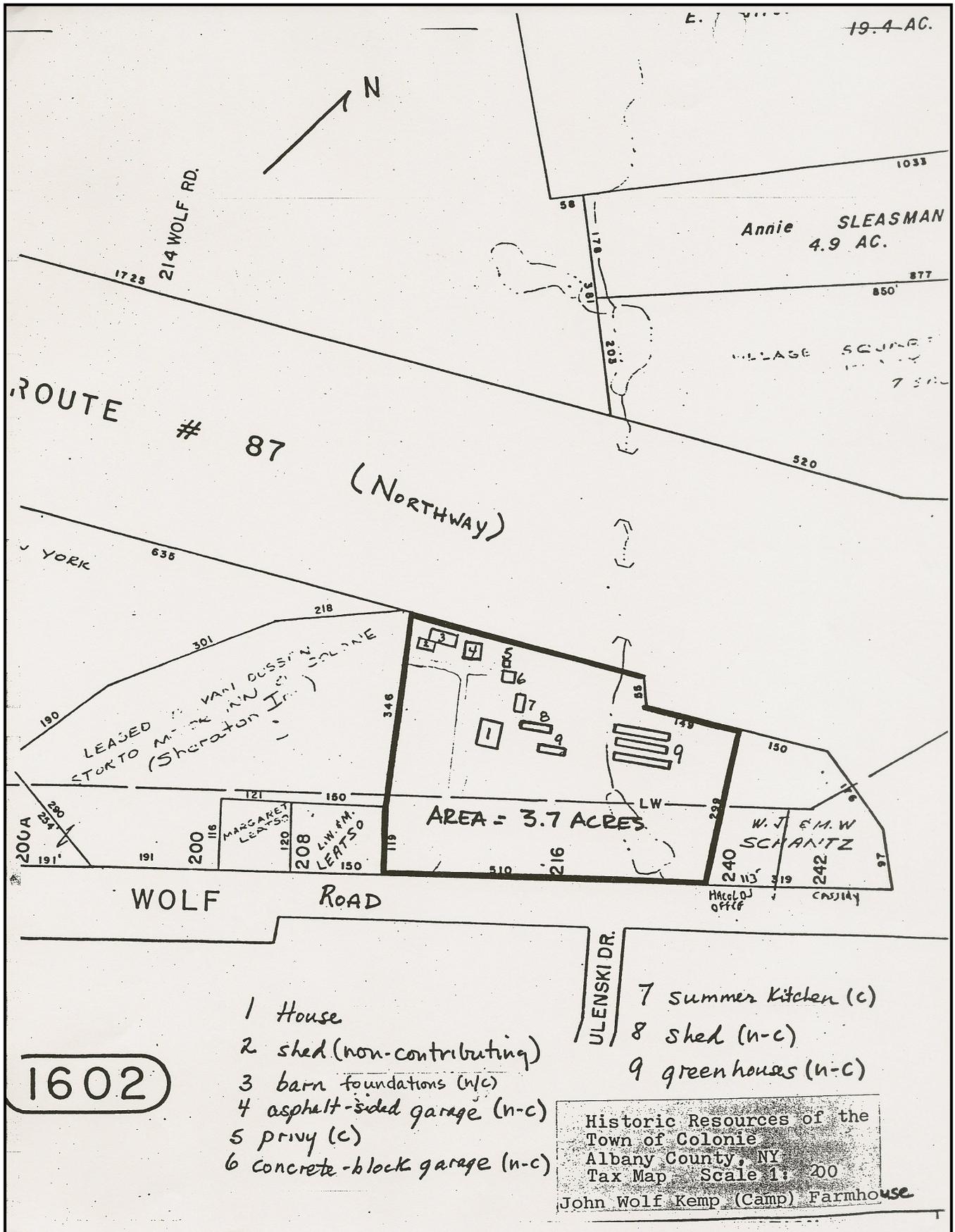
John Kemp, you ask? Yes, John Kemp.

You want more of an explanation, you say? Well, okay. 'John Kemp' is the anglicized version of Johan Kampff, according to a letter written in May 1990 by a descendent, Mr. Steven Hicks of Lawrence, KS. The letter says that Kemp was a man of

German ancestry and "German men of that era were very often...known by their middle name." What was John Kemp's middle name, you ask? Answer: Wulf. Thus, the main thoroughfare running along the front of the property was called "Wulf's Road."

The English speaking record-keeping difficulty is seen over and over again with the name, which appears at various times at Kampff, Kemp and Camp. In the records of the Lutheran Church in Albany, the family name appears as Kampf. To further confuse the issue, in the first US Census of 1790, "John Wolfcamp" lived in "Watervliet" – which, of course, has become present day Colonie.

According to a tax map, the "John Wolf Kemp (Camp) Farmhouse" was located just about in the vicinity of the current day Homewood Suites, and several outbuildings, such as a shed, barn, garage, privy, summer kitchen and greenhouse, surrounded the farmhouse on the north and east sides. The property ran along Wolf Road to approximately the Exit 4 ramp. Although not dated, the map shows the site of Interstate 87, the Adirondack Northway, known as "The Northway."



Tax Map of the John Wolf Kemp Farmhouse

The John Wolf Kemp (Camp) farmhouse was located at 216 Wolf Road in the Town of Colonie according to a Building Structure Inventory Form done by the Division for Historic Preservation, New York Parks and Recreation, in June 1982. The form reveals that the original house was constructed c. 1780 of brick with masonry and brick load bearing walls. The condition of the house at the time was "good." It also lists a brick addition (1870) as well as a wood addition and an enclosed front porch (1940).

The house was set back from Wolf Road and was a distinctive example of a modest Federal style residence. The structure embodies many Federal style characteristics such as a central hall and lightly scaled corner returns. Several out-buildings surround the house, as shown on the tax map.



The Wolf Kemp / Leatso Farmhouse (Spring 2002)



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Historical Society Town of Colonie

Welcome New Members!

The Historical Society of the Town of Colonie would like to welcome our newest members: Peter Sokaris, John Fahey and Victor Mahoney. Welcome!

Now, most of us have travelled south on the Northway. Uhh, yes, south on the Northway. (You have to live around here to understand the logic, eh?) Traveling from the north in the southbound lane, after crossing the new bridge over Albany Shaker Road and passing the Desmond on your right, continue looking right and you will see a small family graveyard perched atop a diminutive mound of dirt. This is the Johannes Wulf Kampff (i.e. John Wolf Kemp) cemetery, where several members of the Kemp family are interred. I'm sure many people have wondered about this burial site.

The land the cemetery is on is part of the flight approach path to the runway of the Albany Airport, and is therefore a protected area, not to be trespassed on by order of law. In March 2015 three members of the Colonie Historical Society received special permission to go to the cemetery. (Permission is essential - the site is monitored and trespassers will be removed by police.) On a cold, windy day, Bob Reilly, Ed Engel and this writer braved the elements and took stock of the gravestones there. We report that all of the stones are weather-worn, suffering the damages of numerous years of acid rain, extreme heat, biting cold, frigid winds and mounds of snow. Most are illegible, some are broken, and the location makes the cemetery difficult to care for. It was during our visit that we were 'introduced' to Johannes Wulf Kampff and several members of his family. Another surname, Socks, is also a headstone among those interred here. This writer counted 18 headstones in the cemetery. Some footstones are also extant.



**Broken headstone of Johannes Wulf Kampff
Nee: John Wolf Kemp**



HSTC Trustee Bob Reilly (left) and HSTC Vice President Ed Engel (right) at the Wolf Kemp Family Cemetery



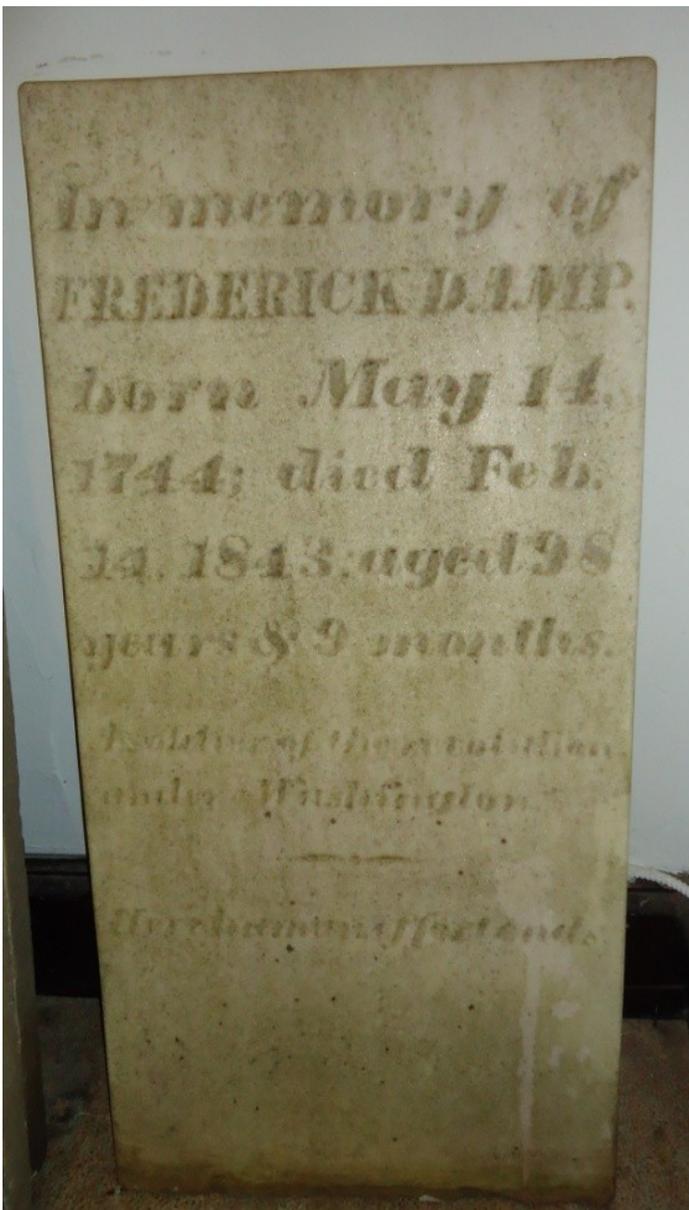
**The Wolf Kemp Family Cemetery
Southbound lane of I-87 in background**

The Kemp farmhouse naturally changed owners several times down through the years. Perhaps the most remembered family that occupied the homestead was the Leatso family. Over time their fields of corn and cabbage, and their business (Leatso's Flowers and Greenhouse) had been reduced to six acres from the original 104 acres.

A couple of other family businesses have also disappeared due to the conversion of Wolf Road from a residential to a commercial thoroughfare. Remember Douty Farms, now the location of the Olive Garden? How about Platt's Place, which today is the site of Buca di Beppo Italian Restaurant?

FREDERICK DAMP HEADSTONE MYSTERY SOLVED!

In 2011, the Watervliet Historical Society was contacted by Tom and Ruthanne Morford of Middletown, New Jersey. Ruthanne's father had done some family genealogy and discovered that an ancestor by the name of Frederick Damp had served in the Continental Army. While researching Damp's background, he found that Damp was buried in Watervliet, New York. Traveling to the area many years ago, he found the gravestone for Damp was located in a "chicken yard." The stone was damaged, broken off at the base.



**Headstone of Frederick Damp
at the Watervliet Historical Society.
Related to the Kemp family?**

The owner of the property allowed Ruthanne's father to take the headstone so it could be repaired. He brought the headstone back to New Jersey where the jagged base was smoothed over. The stone remained on the Morford farm for several years. Ruthanne's father had planned to return to Watervliet someday and remove Frederick Damp's remains for final interment at the Damp family plot in Albany Rural Cemetery. Unfortunately, Ruthanne's father passed away before he was able to have this done. Sadly, no one in Ruthanne's family knew the exact location of the grave or the name of the person to contact in Watervliet where Damp's remains might be interred.

In July 2011, Tom Morford made the call to the Watervliet Historical Society to offer them the headstone. This writer met Tom and Ruthanne at a rest stop of the Thruway and transported the stone to the Watervliet Historical Society where it is displayed. The question that remains is: was Frederick Damp's headstone at one time on the Kemp family property? Or possibly even in the Kemp cemetery?

The mystery has been solved! Since the return of the Damp headstone, our Town Historian Kevin Franklin has been contacted regarding the whereabouts of the stone. Very recently, this writer and Kevin shared communication about the Damp stone. It is now known that the stone was removed from the old Methodist burial ground on Old Niskayuna Road. Kevin had been contacted by descendants of Frederick Damp that were looking for the stone, but had no idea what might have happened to it.

Now our work is cut out for us. We shall contact the Watervliet Historical Society to acquire the stone and research the exact location where the Damp stone once stood. We will endeavor to have it checked by a local gravestone restorer, and re-installed in its proper place. Don't ya love it when a plan comes together?

WRITER'S NOTE: HSTC Vice President Ed Engel provided the documentation used for this issue. The sources are: the Division for Historic Preservation, New York Parks & Recreation Building Structure Inventory Form (1982); the U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places—Nomination Form (1987); Letter from Kemp family descendent Steven Hicks to "Daniel" (1990); Tax Map from the Historic Resources of the Town of Colonie (2002); and "The Wolf Kemp/Leatso Farm" paper, compiled by Ron Migliore (no date.) There was far too much information in these resources to do a highly detailed report of the Wolf Road area. I believe this newsletter will have many of our readers posing a multitude of questions and hopefully others providing additional information of Wolf Road.

Yes, I would like to become a member of the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie, New York, Inc. in the classification I have checked or renew my membership as noted.

My annual dues payment in the amount of \$ _____ is enclosed.

Classification	Annual Dues	Classification	Annual Dues	Classification	Annual Dues
<input type="checkbox"/> Students and Senior Citizens . . .	\$10.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$15.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting	\$100—\$250
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	12.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Business	50.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor	\$250.00 & Up

Please accept my additional donation of \$ _____ as a gift to the Historical Society. *The Historical Society is a not-for-profit corporation.*

Name _____

Address _____

Cit/Town _____ Zip Code _____ Home Phone # _____

Cell Phone Number _____ E-Mail _____

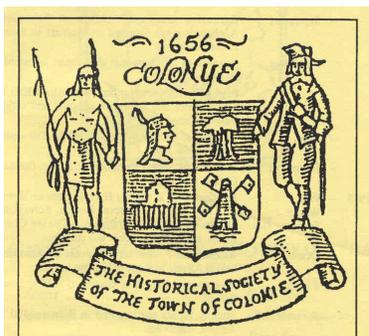
Please mail to Membership Chairperson c/o Historical Society, Memorial Town Hall, Newtonville, N. Y. 12128-0508

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**THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF THE TOWN OF COLONIE**

Kevin Franklin: Town Historian

Current Officers of the Society



Historical Society Founded 1971

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NEWTONVILLE, NY 12128-0508
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Support the Society's efforts to stimulate an appreciation of the historical heritage of your community. Join Now!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

My sincere apology for the lateness in getting this newsletter published. No excuses offered—just ‘mea culpa.’ At the beginning of this year several members of the HSTC Board were discussing the Kemp gravesite, and thanks to Ed Engel we were given permission to spend some time there investigating. The blustery weather made our visit short, but we achieved our goal.

Our upcoming membership meeting is set for Sunday, October 11 at 2 p.m. at the Sanford Library. Our speaker, Tom Allison, will give us an enjoyable presentation titled, “The Greatest Show on Earth” - a wonderful program on a local circus. No Giants football on that date—some come on out for some history. We hope to see you there!

Mark Bodnar, President