



“Doubtless the wildest and most awe-inspiring gorge among the deep and shaggy recess in the western side of Mount Washington, into which the famous cascade, Bash Bish Falls, comes dashing in a striking series of bold leaps and plunges.”

From Taghconic by Godfrey Greylock, 1908

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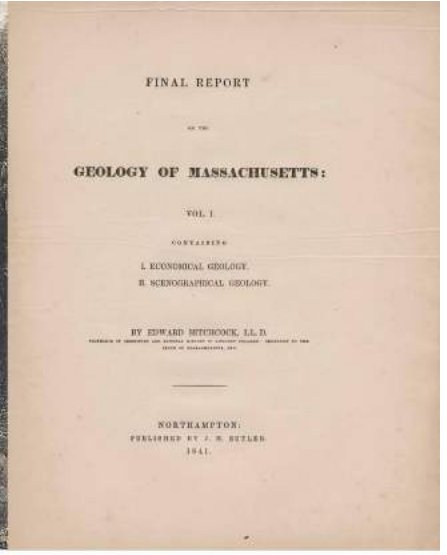
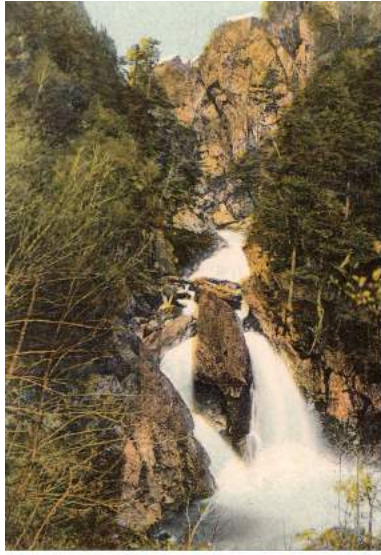
Exhibit curated by Greg Keffer and Darin Johnson of Copake Falls, NY.

The exhibit was generously underwritten by the Roeliff Jansen Historical Society, Greg Keffer and Darin Johnson, and gifts from friends who have asked to remain anonymous.

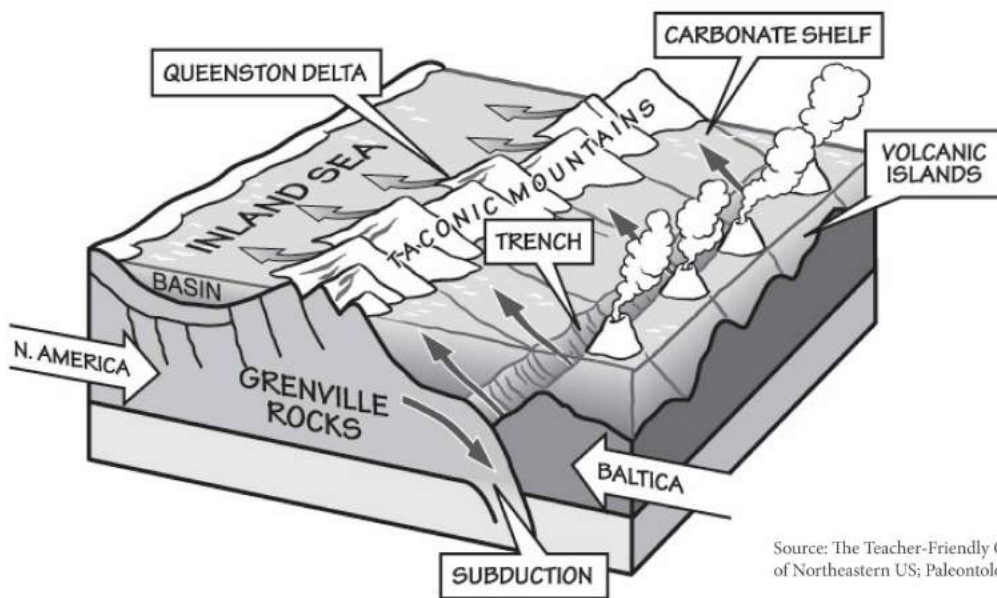
Though most of the material on display in this exhibit exists in the public domain or is part of the Roeliff Jansen Historical Society collection, we wish to thank Robin Bruce, Deborah Cohen, Mike Fallon, Edgar Masters, Judy Whitbeck and others for contributions from their personal collections.

We also thank our friends at the Taconic State Park, Mount Washington State Forest, Friends of Taconic State Park, Mount Washington Historical Society, Berkshire Historical Society and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. We are also grateful to the Town of Copake for use of this historic building. A special thank you to the members and donors of the Roeliff Jansen Historical Society.

Visit www.roeliffjansenhs.org to become a member or make a contribution to support the historical society's work.



The Taconic Mountains rise gradually from hills in eastern New York to a sharp mountain crest along the west border of the New England states. They were formed from the collision of the North American Plate into a volcanic island arc during the late Ordovician period 440 million years ago.



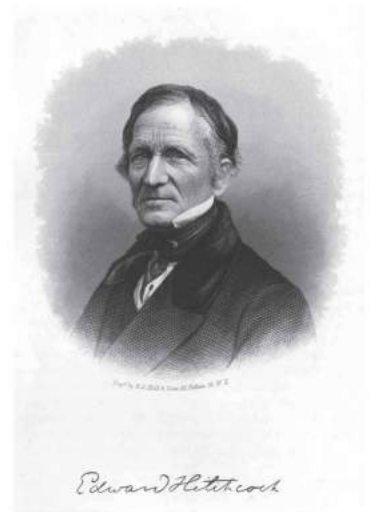
Source: The Teacher-Friendly Guide to the Earth Science of Northeastern US; Paleontological Research Institution

Bash Bish Falls is the result of this collision. The water flows from highland streams and springs on Mount Washington. It cascades through a series of gorges and a hemlock-hardwood ravine forest, and then drops about 60 feet into a sparkling pool. Though the waterfall is widely known for its dramatic setting, the gorge above is equally dramatic – a sheer rock wall that rises 194 feet. After the falls, Bash Bish Brook flows into the Roeliff Jansen Kill and on to the Hudson River.

Though Algonquin-speaking Native Americans used the gorge as an opportunity to pass through the Taconic Mountains, only a few arrowheads and legends survive.

Geology of Taconic Mountains and Bash Bish

The first historical description of the falls was published in 1841 by geologist Edward Hitchcock in his “Final Report on the Geology of Massachusetts,” based on visits to the falls with Edward Everett. Both Hitchcock and Everett did much to advance the reputation of Bash Bish during their long careers. Hitchcock went on to serve as President of Amherst College. Everett became a United States Congressman, Governor of Massachusetts, and President of Harvard University. Mount Everett, the highest peak in the southern Taconic Mountains, was named in his honor.



“From a spot upon Mount Washington one descends about two thousand feet and finds a noisy stream, about a rod wide, which for a short distance, tumbles rapidly down between perpendicular cliffs of talcose slate, a hundred feet high.

Soon striking a huge barrier of this rock, the brook turns, at right angles, to the left, and for fifty or sixty rods, rushes down a declivity of eighty degrees. Here the water has performed its greatest wonders.

Sinking its bed for unknown ages, and at the same time beating with its waters on the edges of the slate, it has worn a dome shaped cavity to the depth of one hundred and ninety-four feet. At the bottom of this cavity, one is at the foot of a vast wall of rock which encloses him to the east, south and west; and as it rises, curves outward so that, looking upward, he sees it at the height of nearly two hundred feet, projecting full twenty-five feet from its base.

From the uppermost fall, the stream leaps in several smaller cascades perhaps sixty feet in the aggregate, half hidden by huge boulders and overhanging trees. At length we arrive at the principal fall. The water divided in twain by a huge boulder poised upon its brink, falls over a nearly straight and perpendicular precipice, about sixty feet, into a deep basin. Any single view, as this detailed description shows, can take in but a small portion of the scenery of Bash Bish Gorge.”



By the mid-nineteenth century, Bash Bish Falls had become the object of romantic pilgrimages. America had entered an Industrial Age, and a movement had begun to represent, and rescue, “American Paradise” through art.

This artistic movement, called the Hudson River School of Art (1825-1875), had a distinctive style – romantic and highly expressive. It also embodied a host of ideas deeply held by the American people at the time. Major human concerns – relating to nature and morality – all found their way into works of art.

Though more dramatic settings were captured by the artists associated with the movement, Bash Bish was the subject for many, including Kensett, Durand and Martin. In fact, Kensett painted Bash Bish five times between 1852 and 1860.



Henry Van-Lennep (1815-1889)
Bashapish Lower Falls, 1841
Amherst College Collection



John Frederick Kensett (1816-1872)
The Bash-Bish, 1855
National Academy Museum, New York City

Romanticism, Art and the Falls



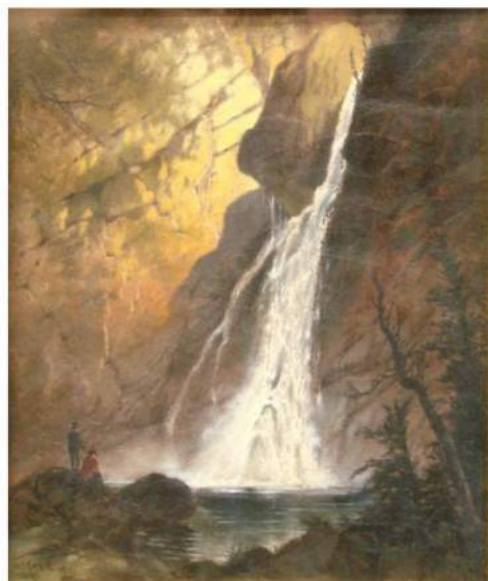
John Frederick Kensett (1816-1872)
Bash-Bish Falls, 1855
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



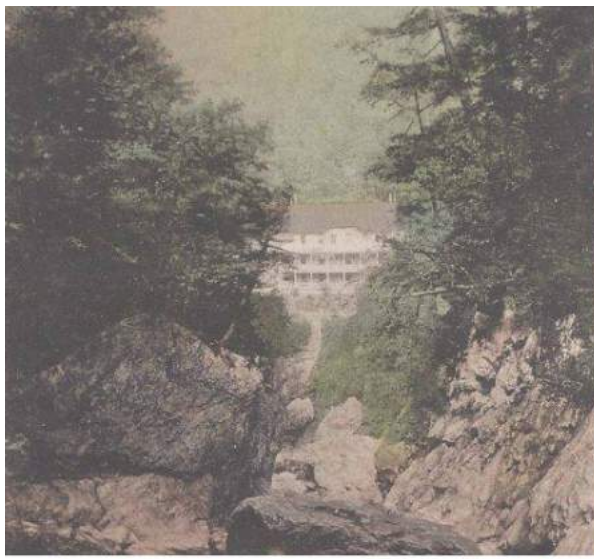
John Frederick Kensett (1816-1872)
Bash Bish, 1858
Private Collection



Asher B. Durand (1796-1886)
Bash Bish Falls, 1861
The Century Association, New York City



George Herbert McCord (1848-1909)
Bash Bish Falls, 1871
Private Collection



1850 First commercial development established at the base of Bash Bish Falls in the form of a simple tavern.

1867 Professor Jean Roemer who would later become President of the City College of New York, acquires eight parcels, including land around the falls.

1870 Bash Bish tavern burns.



1874 Alfred and Josephine Douglas purchase the land and build an elaborate Swiss chalet-style residence with multiple outbuildings and finely landscaped grounds. The Douglas estate was located near what is today the lower parking lot in New York

1876 Alfred Douglas dies prematurely at the age of 47, leaving his Bash Bish estate to his wife.



1879 Josephine Douglas builds the second Bash Bish Inn. It is believed the inn is built in approximately the same location as the original 1850s tavern given its dramatic views looking across the gorge to the falls.

1897 Bash Bish Inn is demolished after eighteen seasons. The lumber was reused to build housing for the Copake Iron Works.



1899 John Flagler, a prominent manufacturer of iron pipe, acquires the falls property that includes acreage in both New York and Massachusetts.

1903 Eugene and Margaret Vacheron, restaurateurs of French cuisine, purchase Flagler's New York acreage – he maintains ownership of the falls and surrounding Massachusetts land. Sometime after this acquisition, they convert the Douglas house to the third Bash Bish Inn. They add a 40' by 75' addition to the Douglas house, as well as an eight-room Swiss chalet .



1914 Louis Moquin, a well-known New York City chef specializing in French cuisine, buys the Inn through foreclosure. The Inn's third incarnation experiences great success.

The Inns of Bash Bish Falls

- 1918** The inn is destroyed by fire and never rebuilt.
- 1920** Philip Schick, a New York City attorney, acquires the Douglas and Vacheron land and outbuildings, and creates a commercial automobile campground accommodating 150 adults. Many consider this development an urgent threat to the unspoiled beauty of Bash Bish Falls.
- 1925** New York State forms the Taconic State Park, taking over the remaining cottages. The park officially opens in 1928. Bash Bish Falls and adjacent lands in Massachusetts remain in private hands.



Bash Bish Inn's Rose Cottage Remains

An original cottage from the third Bash Bish Inn still stands at 10 Miles Road South in Copake Falls. Known as the Rose Cottage, the building was moved to its current location in the 1950's and over the years significantly altered. The Rose Cottage was one of several cottages available to travelers for "most reasonable rates" from April 16th to October 1st.





Bash Bish Falls is located within the 4,169-acre Mount Washington State Forest in Massachusetts. The adjacent Taconic State Park, in New York State, covers some 7,000 acres and provides easiest access to the falls. Both parks offer camping, miles of trails, swimming and stunning views of the Catskills, Hudson Valley and Berkshires.

Conserving a Natural Wonder

As early as the 1880's, concerned conservationists advocated the idea of protecting the falls and the surrounding mountainous areas through public ownership. Later, a tri-state coalition of public ownership comprised of Massachusetts, New York and Connecticut was considered, but the concept had neither the funding nor the leadership to materialize.

From the 1850s to the 1920s, the falls were owned by a series of private owners including Jean Roemer, Douglas and Josephine Douglas, and John Flagler

In 1924, Francis and Ella Masters purchased 200-acres, including Bash Bish Falls, from John Flagler. Their sole purpose was to protect this remarkable site from commercial development. In 1928, the land was sold to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts with the proviso that this natural wonder be accessible to the public in perpetuity.



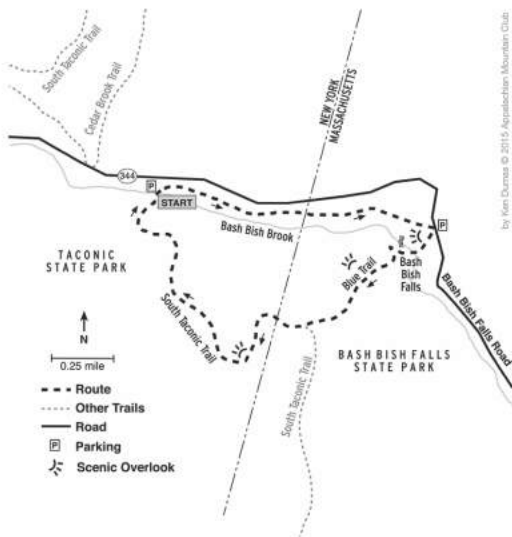
Bash Bish Falls Today

GETTING THERE

There are two popular trails to the falls:

Lower Access – Beginning in New York State, the three-quarters of a mile trail follows the Bash Bish Brook. The trail begins at the lower parking lot off New York State Route 344.

Upper Access – Starting from the upper parking lot in Massachusetts, this 0.6-mile trail descends steeply. While a shorter hike, it is considered to be a more strenuous, steeper adventure.



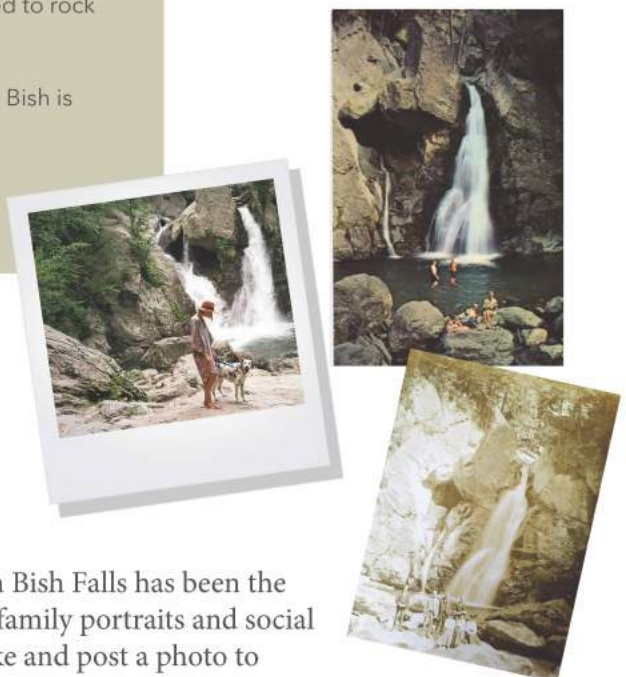
DID YOU KNOW?

- 1 Today, an estimated 200,000 people visit Bash Bish Falls each year.
- 2 More than 25 deaths have occurred at the falls in the past 50 years. Though some deaths were due to drowning, most were related to rock climbing and jumping.
- 3 It may not be as dramatic as Niagara Falls, but at 80 feet, Bash Bish is one of New England's tallest waterfalls.
- 4 The falls are maintained and managed by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation.



#bashbishfalls

Since the invention of the camera, Bash Bish Falls has been the backdrop of hundreds of thousands of family portraits and social media posts. Visit the falls this year, take and post a photo to Instagram, and tag your post #bashbish



The Legend of Bash Bish Falls

Many Native American legends were passed on to the first Europeans who settled the Taconic region in the 1690s. “The Spirit of Bash Bish” is one of the most enduring legends.

According to the legend, the falls were named for a beautiful Mohican maiden named Bash-Bish. After giving birth to a daughter – White Swan, she was accused of adultery and condemned to death. Tied to a canoe, Bash-Bish was carried by the swift current down the brook to the falls.

However, so goes the legend, a cloud of colorful butterflies appeared and surrounded Bash-Bish – just as the canoe vanished into the falls. Because her body was never recovered, Bash-Bish became known by her people as a powerful spirit.





The legend continues with White Swan...

According to the legend, White Swan grew into a beautiful maiden like her mother. Later, when she was unable to conceive a child, her husband took a second wife. White Swan was inconsolable.

One night in a dream, White Swan had a vision of her mother, Bash-Bish, calling to her from the waterfall. Believing that dreams were prophetic, White Swan went to the falls to listen to her mother's voice. According to the legend, White Swan's husband followed her and witnessed colorful butterflies surround his wife – just as she disappeared into the cascade.

The husband jumped into the water to rescue White Swan but was killed by the rapids and crushing rocks. Though his body was found, the body of White Swan, like that of her mother, Bash-Bish, was never discovered.

Even today, visitors report seeing the shape of a woman in the cascading water – and colorful butterflies dancing over crystal pools.