



CITY OF PEEKSKILL

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

John G. Testa
Mayor

Evidence Accumulating Pointing to Peekskill as Inspiration and Home for “Yellow Brick Road.” Vanished Books May Hold Key.

“Wizard of Oz” Author L. Frank Baum Spent School Years in City in 1860s and Yearned for Escape. New Findings Show Yellow Brick Road Was Likely Present During Baum’s Tenure.

Special Media Event on Findings Scheduled for Thursday, Sept 22 at 3:30 p.m.; Launch of Pia Lindman’s Excavation of the Yellow Brick Road and Skipping Contest Set for Saturday, Sept 24th at 2:00 p.m. Road is Next to Corner of Hudson Ave. and Water St.

For Immediate Release

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**Contact: Mayor John Testa
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PEEKSKILL, NY—Exciting new research is providing significant support to longtime claims that Peekskill helped inspire the Wizard of Oz’s Yellow Brick Road. The evidence also seems to show that the City’s one remaining Yellow Brick Road existed when Oz author L. Frank Baum went to school in Peekskill in the 1860s and that he likely saw it regularly.

In a special media event on Thursday, Sept. 22 at 3:30 p.m., the new evidence will be presented in public for the first time.

840 Main Street, Peekskill, NY 10566 (914) 734-4105

Strong visuals will be available, including historic maps, video documenting the research leading to new discoveries, actual yellow bricks from the Yellow Brick Road, and a modern reprint of the Oz first edition. Mayor Testa and artist Pia Lindman will also be in attendance.

Another event will take place Saturday, Sept. 24th at 2:00 p.m. That's when Lindman plans to stage a skipping contest on the newly repaired Yellow Brick Road. "All dance styles, if any, are welcome," Lindman says. "Contestants can be of any age, sex or physical orientation. The disabled are welcome. Little dogs are also welcome, but they must be nice little dogs," she says. Contestants can skip alone or as a group, and families can enter together. Prizes will be awarded.

Some key pieces of evidence in the story went missing during the dissolution of the Peekskill Military Academy in the 1960s—a complete set of first editions of The Wizard of Oz series that were donated to the Peekskill Military Academy by Baum. He signed each copy. The exact wording of the inscriptions would provide key evidence about his relationship with Peekskill, but the text has currently been lost. First editions of "Oz" in excellent condition can cost \$20,000. A signed book would be worth far more than that.

Baum spent two of the most difficult, challenging years of his life at the Peekskill Military Academy during which he desperately yearned for escape. As he went too and from school and made his way through Peekskill, he would have almost had to pass by a short stretch of yellow brick road by the City's waterfront. Recent excavations and scholarly efforts have shown that this road almost certainly existed when he was in town.

In a research effort sponsored by the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art and supported by the City of Peekskill, numerous details about both the City and Baum's time in it have been unearthed. One stunning surprise: the fact that the bricks in Yellow Brick Road were not made in the 1890s, as was previously assumed, but well before 1870. This is critical because Baum attended the Peekskill Military Academy in school years 1868 and 1869.

Artist Pia Lindman, a Fellow at MIT and a Fulbright Scholar, is the driving force behind the effort. She undertook the campaign as part of The Peekskill Project, a series of dozens of artistic efforts focused on the City of Peekskill that will take place and be presented starting the weekend of Sept. 24th. Lindman will present her art project with the title "The Launch of The Excavation of the Yellow Brick Road" in Peekskill, NY.

When she began her "Excavation" several months ago, Lindman was looking to dig up information and history as well as national collective imagination embedded in the roads of Peekskill. After she secured the support of Peekskill Mayor John G. Testa, she was able to do all of these things.

Part of the reason for Testa's intensive support is that he himself is a crucial part of Baum's Peekskill story. Although records show that Baum had a tough time going to school in the City, he always considered himself an alumnus and felt he had learned much while attending the institution.

No sign of this was clearer than the signed first editions of every one of the Oz books that Baum sent to the Academy. Baum wrote 14 Oz books between 1900 and his death in 1919. One of Testa's most powerful childhood memories is seeing those books in the Peekskill Military Academy Museum when he was less than 10 years old.

“My father worked for the PMA. He said, ‘You have to see this. These books were autographed by the man who invented Oz.’” More than 40 years later, Testa recalls the signature, but not the exact inscription.

Although he understands that it’s not likely the vanished books will be returned to the City or the Peekskill Museum, Testa would just like to find out what the inscriptions said. “We’re putting together a puzzle here, and it would be wonderful to know what Baum really felt about his time in Peekskill. Those books can help tell us that,” Testa says. If anyone has access to the books or their inscriptions, they are welcome to contact the City anonymously and tell what they say.

A key aspect of the project is that outside experts are now reinforcing a longstanding Peekskill tradition, Testa says. The City is not making any claims officially itself, he points out. The project also helps reinforce Peekskill’s image as a place with a deep and fascinating history, he says.

Numerous organizations banded together to help support the effort, among them the Peekskill Military Academy Alumni Association, Historic Peekskill Inc. and the Fort Hill Homeowner’s Alliance.

Peekskill’s Yellow Brick Road is next to the corner of Hudson Avenue and Water Street. Those going north on Route 9 should simply take the Hudson Avenue exit and turn left. Those going South should turn right. Water Street is about one block away before the train tracks.

For more information, call Mayor John Testa at 914-734-4105.

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