

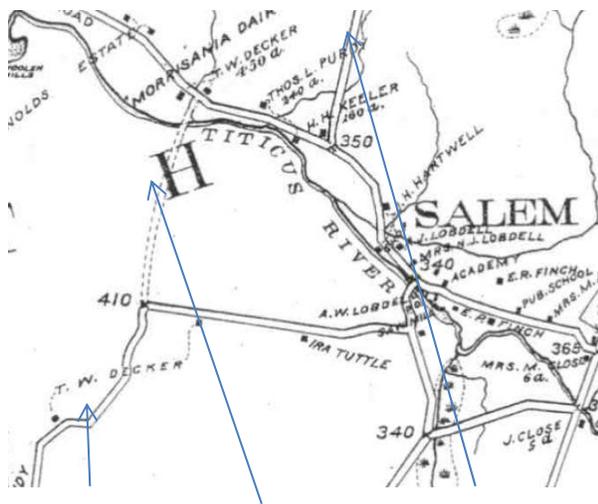
Backward Glances: An Innovative Farm That Spanned a Valley

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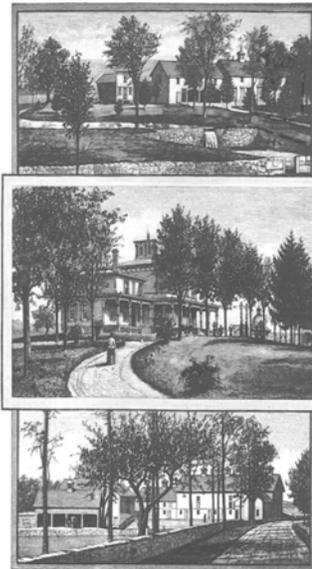
In the 19th century, the area that is now under Titicus Reservoir was farm and pasture land and also home to a few mills and a burial ground. All of this was lost or moved when the New York legislature agreed to meet the demands of a thirsty city and build another reservoir. One farm, called “A model dairy farm” by Thomas Scharf in his 1886 *History of Westchester County*, belonged to Thompson W. Decker.

As a young man, Decker milked cows on an estate in Morrisania (now the south Bronx) and delivered the milk to customers in the city. By the 1840s he had his own milk route and opened a store on East 27th Street. It became the headquarters of T.W. Decker & Sons, a company he led until his death in 1902. Eventually the expanding company moved to Park Avenue and East 63 Street.

In the 1860s Decker bought nearly 400 acres in North Salem from Smiths, Howes, Reynolds and other long-time residents and created a dairy farm that stretched from Cat Ridge Cemetery, including today’s Chase Meadow Farm, across the valley all the way to the river and Titicus Road. On this detail from the map of North Salem in the 1893 *Bien Atlas of Westchester County*, the last map to show the town before the reservoir, you can see the Decker farm road that linked Cat Ridge and Titicus Roads. The farm, seen in these engravings from Scharf’s book, was a splendid place on Titicus Road, west of Delancey Road.



Cat Ridge Rd farm road
Delancey Rd



Decker called his farm the Morrisania Dairy and stocked it with 150 cows. He is believed to have been the first milk dealer to persuade the railroad to deliver his product – as much as 1600 quarts a day -- to the city, and, as his business grew, he bought milk from other North Salem farmers. Aware of the value of PR, he invited the public and reporters to see the farm operations and his innovations and modern appliances for feeding his cows and keeping the milk pure and safe. According to the New York Times, “Mr. Decker has never allowed a single drop of watered or adulterated milks to be sent from his establishment.”

In the early 1890s the city began to take the land that would be flooded by the new reservoir. Decker was forced to move his home to the east side of Delancey Road where it stands today on the corner. The barns were either dismantled and sold or moved somewhere else. With very little land left for the cows, the model dairy farm was history. Does anyone know what happened to the barns?