

Rhinebeck traces its history to a 1688 patent from the Crown of England, when five Dutch families obtained the patent for land on the east shore of the Hudson River, confirming a purchase from the Indians. These Native Americans known as the Sepasco Indians had established a trail, leading east from the Hudson River, past the site of the present Beekman Arms toward Lake Sepasco.

Before long, Henry Beekman, another Dutch settler acquired the remaining land in the present town and brought additional families here. The Post Road, established 1703, passed through Henry's land and intersected the Indian trail to the river. The land acquired the name Rhinebeck about 1715 when Beekman attracted 35 German Palatine families from the failed English Tar Camps project in the present Germantown area.

The Town contains many historic homes including some stone houses dating from the first settlers, early in the 18th century. At the urging of President Franklin Roosevelt, the post office, located next to the Beekman Arms is modeled after the first known stone house, built by Henry Kip. The original lintel stone dated 1700 is on display in the lobby. This house was, for many years, the home of the most important land holder, Henry Beekman.

The Revolutionary War brought resident General Richard Montgomery into an ill-fated campaign to capture Quebec. Montgomery became the first American general to die in the Revolution. His brother-in-law, Robert R. Livingston served on the committee to draft the Declaration of Independence and later administered the oath of office to the first president, George Washington.

Farming has been always been an important part of Rhinebeck's economy, and furnished sustenance for troops in both the Revolutionary and the Civil War. The river offered a robust trade by sloop & barge to New York and other ports. Farming expanded in the last century to provide dairy products and many apple orchards.

Rhinebeck Village was incorporated in 1834. A large portion of the village consists of land which Henry Beekman had donated to the Rhinebeck Dutch Reformed Church (established 1730). Village lots on this land continue to pay quit rent to the church. Other churches in the village include Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, Episcopal and Roman Catholic denominations.

Throughout the centuries, millionaires have located mansions in the town and developed beautiful estates. Ferncliff, the famous country estate of the Astor family & Ellerslie, the estate of the 22nd Vice President, Levi P. Morton were part of a progression of estates along the Hudson shoreline. Wealthy residents have contributed libraries, roads, bridges, the railroad station, churches and other public buildings to the Town.

A new industry, the production of Violets for bouquets and corsages ushered in the gilded age of Victorian splendor and society excess prior to World War I. Rhinebeck became known as the Crystal City because of its numerous greenhouses. After World War II, the nearby facilities of IBM provided employment for many Rhinebeck Residents. Today a portion of residents commute to work in New York City or enjoy second homes in Rhinebeck.

A large designated Historic District is located in the Village of Rhinebeck. Over 400 buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The town also includes a National Historic District including the riverfront estates and Multiple Resource listings of sites throughout the town.

Many of the roads in the western section of the town have been declared scenic and offer beautiful vistas of open fields, the Hudson River and the Catskill Mountains. Comprehensive planning, open space conservation, and historic preservation aim to maintain the charm of our community, honoring the past and anticipating the future.

