

## Historic and Cultural Resources

### *RHINEBECK'S HISTORY*

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**T**he Town of Rhinebeck has a rich historical and cultural past spanning over 300 years of European settlement and several thousand years of pre-historic habitation by Native Americans. Much of Rhinebeck's unique legacy is recognized in two large historic districts and many scattered historic sites throughout the town. The town is home to a portion of a National Historic Landmark District, the State Mid-Hudson Historic Shorelands Scenic District, the Estates District Scenic Area of Statewide Significance, State Scenic Byways, and a Coastal Zone area. It is also within the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area and the state's Hudson River Valley Greenway.

Today, Rhinebeck's ongoing commitment to planning, natural resource protection and historic preservation, as well as its excellent quality of life, has made it an attractive community for those who seek a place with these attributes. While Rhinebeck's population declined in the 1990's due to the closure of IBM Kingston, between 2000 and 2003, the population of the town (excluding the Village) surged, increasing 6.8 percent – almost double Dutchess County's rate of growth for this same period. This rate of change is significant because Dutchess County is one of the fastest growing counties in New York State.

The Sepasco Indians originally inhabited Rhinebeck's land areas, but in 1686, several Dutch families purchased a large tract for settlement. The area remained predominately Dutch until 1713, when Judge Henry Beekman began to interest German Palatine settlers in utilizing his large land holdings. This community was clustered around the Old Stone Church and Palatine homestead at Wey's Corners. Then, mills were established along the Landsman Kill in the vicinity of the present Crystal Lake, and William Traphagen built a tavern on lands located on the "Flatts." Others began to settle in the same area.

In 1730, Colonel Henry Beekman, the son of the patentee, Judge Henry Beekman, granted to a group of settlers a site of two acres of land on the corner of King's Highway (Route 9) and the Indian Trail (South Street) for the building of the Dutch Reformed Church and cemetery. The building of the church and tavern near the mills provided the nucleus for the present Village of Rhinebeck. The Town of Rhinebeck was officially organized on March 7, 1788, having evolved over time from several smaller settlements, including Kipsbergen in present day Rhinecliff. The village was later incorporated in 1834.

During the Revolutionary War, General Richard Montgomery, then a resident of Rhinebeck, bravely led the patriot forces in an unsuccessful assault on Quebec. He died in the attempt, becoming the first American general to lose his life in the War for Independence. There were

many other local residents who figured prominently in that important period of our country's history.

Throughout its early development, Rhinebeck prospered because of the many mills along the Landsman Kill and the docks along the river. The Albany Post Road, which is now State Route 9, carried stagecoach passengers and mail between New York and Albany. Boats made regularly scheduled trips between the docks in Rhinecliff and New York City. Commerce flourished, and so did the area.

In the mid-nineteenth century, rail lines were laid along the Hudson between New York and Albany. Somewhat later, the Hucklebush Rail Line was laid, which connected Rhinecliff with Connecticut. The railroad greatly enhanced ease of travel to and from the area.

During the late Victorian period, a variety of violet was developed locally, which became popular for use in nosegays and corsages. For several decades greenhouses were found on almost every block in the village and throughout the countryside. Rhinebeck violets were shipped worldwide, and Rhinebeck assumed the title "Violet Capital of the World," but the depression delivered a devastating blow to the violet industry. Only a few growers prevailed until finally, in 1984, the last of the greenhouses ceased violet production. Several greenhouses are now producing anemones, continuing the tradition of Rhinebeck flower growers.

#### HISTORIC SITES AND SCENIC DISTRICTS

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Much of Rhinebeck's unique character is recognized in several districts that are of state and national significance. In 1979, the National Historic Landmark District, which includes portions of the Town of Rhinebeck, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This area also includes the historic shorelands scenic district (as further described in Chapter 10, Scenic Resources) and a town-wide multiple resource district. The Historic Properties maps (Figures 12.1 and 12.2) show the extent of these areas and the location of specific sites on the National Register of Historic Places and local historic sites. Names of the registered site are listed in Appendix 4.

The magnificent homes of the National Historic Landmark District span more than two centuries. They represent the architectural and social history of the times, and served as residences of several successful and powerful New York families. Included in this group of estates is Ferncliff, home of the Astor family.

Farther south at Ellerslie, Levi P. Morton, who was Vice President of the United States under Benjamin Harrison, made his home. During his tenure as Ambassador to France, Mr. Morton formally accepted the gift of the Statue of Liberty from the citizens of France to the citizens of the United States.

The estates assumed additional importance through the role that many of their occupants played in state and national history. However, the special significance of the area is derived from its location along the Hudson River, with views of the Catskill Mountain range adding a dimension that rivals and enhances its historic and architectural significance.

The Rhinebeck Village Historic District, designated in 1980, includes almost 400 buildings, which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Beekman Arms, located in the center of the community, claims recognition as the oldest continuously operating hotel in the United States. It preserves the flavor and character of colonial America. Several surveys of the areas adjacent to the established districts are in progress, and are expected to result in further listings on the National Register of Historic Places.

Scattered throughout the town are stone houses and other examples of colonial vernacular architecture, with many unusual and interesting design features. A town-wide Multiple Resource District that includes 37 sites (44 significant structures) has been added to the National Register. Appendix 4 includes the sites within this district.

The first three sites in the town to be listed on the National Register included the Delamater House in the Village, the Old Stone Church Complex on NYS 9, and the Sands Estate at the junction of Route 9G and Route 308. The Delamater House, designed in 1844 by Alexander Jackson Davis in carpenters' gothic manner, is considered a classic example of Gothic Revival architecture. The Old Stone Church, built in 1786, is typical of front-towered church design of the Georgian period. The Robert Sands Estate burned shortly after listing. The most recent National Register listing is that of the Neher-Elsifer-Cotting House.

The town board has designated the Quitman House (the Old Stone Church parsonage), the Neher-Elsifer-Cotting House (Palatine Farmstead) and Wilderstein as local landmarks.

A number of intact historic resources are clustered in Wurtemberg in the southeast corner of Rhinebeck, near the Clinton town line. Four historic properties – the Pultz farmhouse, Marguardt Farmhouse, John H. Traver Farmhouse and St. Paul's Lutheran Church – are located there, along a one-mile stretch of Wurtemberg Road.

Wurtemberg was a farming community of Palatine settlers during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Pultz Farmhouse dates from the early settlement period, and dating from circa 1750 is the oldest extant structure in Wurtemberg. The Marguardt Farm includes a federal-style farmhouse dating to 1810, and a late-1700s Dutch-type barn. The Traver Farmhouse dates to 1876, and has a Baroque Italianate façade. A Dutch barn from the late 18th century is also on the site.

The focal point of the historic buildings in Wurtemberg is St. Paul's Church which was begun in 1802 and remodeled in 1861. A parsonage and burial grounds are grouped with the church.

What follows is a description of the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register of Historic Places is the nation's official list of cultural resources worthy of protection, based upon the following uniform criteria<sup>1</sup>:

*The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and: a) That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or b) That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or c) That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or d) That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.*

All future land use decision-making in the town should consider sites that are currently listed, or may be listed in the future, on the National Register of Historic Places, through their identification and preservation as found on Figures 12.1 and 12.2 at the end of this chapter. Some of the National Register sites are listed below. The complete list of all National Register sites together with other important historic sites in the town can be found in Appendix 4.

1. Benner House

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<sup>1</sup> From the National Park Service National Register of Historic Places website. This information is located on the *Listing the Property – What is the Process* page. Please see <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/listing.htm> for more information.

2. Rockledge
3. Fredenburg House
4. Traver House
5. Steenburg Tavern
6. Strawberry Hill
7. Progue House
8. Jan Pier House
9. Pultz Farmhouse
10. Marquardt Farmhouse
11. Barringer House
12. Slate Quarry Road Dutch Barn
13. Cox Farmhouse
14. Van Vredenburg Farmhouse
15. Williams Farmhouse
16. Sipperly-Lown Farmhouse
17. J.E. Traver Farmhouse
18. John H. Traver Farmhouse
19. St Paul's Lutheran Church, Parsonage and Cemetery
20. Hillside Methodist chapel
21. J.W. Moore House
22. Riverside Methodist Church & Parsonage
23. Rhinecliff Hotel
24. O'Brien General Store and Post Office
25. Morton Memorial Library
26. Free Church Parsonage
27. Heermance House and Law Office
28. The Maples
29. Grasmere
30. The Grove
31. Mansakenning
32. Evergreen Lands
33. Stonecrest
34. Astor Home for Children
35. Robert Sands Estate
36. Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Peter & parsonage
37. Neher-Elsifer-Losee House
38. Wyncllyffe
39. Whispering Pines
40. Linwood

As shown on Figures 12.1 and 12.2 at the end of this chapter, the entire east bank of the Hudson River within the Town of Rhinebeck and beyond, falls within the Hudson River Heritage National Historic Landmark District. The National Park Service describes the District as follows:

*This 30-square-mile district on the eastern shore of the Hudson River, midway between New York City and Albany, is composed of several villages and a number of country houses. With its Dutch colonial origins and its remarkably diverse ethnic populations, the region holds a unique position in the settlement and social history of the nation. Sedate Dutch homesteads, rustic German farms, industrious Yankee towns, and Gilded Age mansions all contribute to a rich landscape fabric, remarkable for its integrity and its preservation.*

These estate properties, constituting Rhinebeck’s portion of the National Landmark Hudson Valley District represent the most concentrated estate area along the entire Hudson River. Their views of the Hudson with the Catskill Mountains to the west were exceptionally desirable and continue to make this area an extremely important asset for Rhinebeck and for New York State. Sensitive handling of the development of this area is crucial to maintain the estate atmosphere that lends so much importance to Rhinebeck’s historic aspect.

***Vision: All specifically designated historic districts, buildings and features should be preserved for the enjoyment of future generations***

*Rhinebeck has a rich cultural past spanning over 300 years of European settlement and thousands of years of pre-historic habitation. This legacy is demonstrated in the National Landmark District – one of the largest in the nation – and the multi-resource historic district, as well as scattered sites throughout the town. Residents are not only aware of this rich past, but treasure it; the survey and visioning sessions firmly established residents’ desire to protect Rhinebeck’s heritage.*

***Objective: Historic Resources should be protected and new development within historic districts or near historic sites should be consistent with the existing setting of the site, taking into account the history, existing architecture and character of the surrounding area.***

**Actions:**

1. Establish historic district zoning, architectural review procedures and local landmark standards to protect the rich cultural resources of the community.
2. Nominate historic buildings and districts for state and National Register of Historic Places designation. Where historic structures do not qualify for such designation, create criteria to govern local designation.



Historic Delamater House



Architecturally compatible nearby auto showroom

3. Allow adaptive re-use of historic structures to help preserve them by permitting such a range of uses as multi-family housing, bed and breakfasts or tourist guesthouse operations, providing that the re-use is subject to performance standards as part of special use permit requirements (which include protection of the historic structure).
4. Develop a list of all historic properties in the town, to be coordinated by the town historian, including historic properties of national, state and local significance on the list.
5. Establish historic designations for locally recognized structures and their landscape settings, and include the list in The Rhinebeck Plan.
6. Develop standards governing the installation of fences that are compatible with the town’s unique natural, scenic and historic character. Promote the use of stonewalls, when feasible.
7. Identify existing architectural elements that have historic value (i.e. stonewalls, wells and culverts) and incorporate them into any proposed site development as assets to be preserved.

8. Charter the town historian with coordinating an archeological resource inventory and preparation of an archeological sensitivity map which identify areas in Rhinebeck to be protected and make it a part of the Plan once completed.
9. Preserve archaeological resources by carefully considering sensitive archaeological zones identified by New York State and local archaeologists during the SEQOR reviews of proposed developments. File newly discovered archaeological sites with the State for inclusion in its databases.

***Vision: The history and integrity of the hamlet of Rhinecliff should be preserved and its strong civic and cultural life should be maintained.***

*The hamlet of Rhinecliff has evolved as a small center for civic life, culture and limited commercial activity. For almost two decades, residents have consistently stressed the importance of preserving the role of the village of Rhinebeck as the Town's commercial, financial, governmental and residential center while honoring the historic integrity of Rhinecliff as a hamlet. The essence of the hamlet's civic and cultural life is embodied in the Morton Memorial Library and the firehouse, the post office and the Rhinecliff Train Station. While Rhinecliff has some limited potential for growth, its historic character must always be preserved and protected.*

**Actions:**

1. Develop the zoning provisions specific to Rhinecliff as described in Chapter 5.