

RESOURCE GUIDE II: A BRIEF HISTORY OF COLD SPRING AND ITS BUILT ENVIRONMENT



The Wappingers, a local band speaking the Munsee language (a branch of the Algonquian language family), were early inhabitants of the area now known as Cold Spring. Little physical evidence of the tribe remains in Cold Spring Village beyond possible archaeological resources. Scholarship on the Wappingers and their Munsee-speaking neighbors informs us that they lived along the river in longhouses and were deeply dependent on the Hudson as a food source and water route for trade with nearby Algonquian tribes such as the Mahicans and the Lenapes, and, after Henry Hudson's trip up the river in 1609, Dutch traders in the region.

The Algonquians [or Munsees] also devised water drainage and soil retention systems to advance agriculture throughout the Hudson Valley. However, tensions ran high between the Munsees and the Dutch from the earliest days, largely over competition for land and natural resources. By the end of the 1600s, only 100 years after first contact with the Dutch and English, most of the Munsees had been killed in battles or by diseases brought by Europeans, but others survived, many of whom had been forced west. Of those who remained, their presence persisted as occasional trading partners with Dutch and English colonists, or they found other ways of integrating into the colonial economy.

The Dutch colony of New Netherland, including New Amsterdam, was taken by the British in 1644. New Amsterdam was renamed New York for the brother of King Charles II of England, the Duke of York. The King granted a royal award of land along the Hudson River to the Philipse family, including the future site of Cold Spring. During the Dutch and English Colonial periods, notes historian Michael Groth, the Hudson Valley's counties were sparsely settled, largely because of conflicts with Native Americans. In that same period—

RESOURCE GUIDE II: A BRIEF HISTORY OF COLD SPRING AND ITS BUILT ENVIRONMENT (cont.)

and into the third decade of the 19th century—enslaved Africans made up a portion of the Hudson Valley’s population. According to the archives of the New-York Historical Society, enslaved Africans are estimated to have made up between one-fifth and one-third of the area’s population. The Dutch first brought enslaved Africans to the Hudson Valley to work on farms, roads and forts.

Through the Colonial period, landholdings were monopolized by a small, wealthy Dutch and English elite who used enslaved Africans and indentured European immigrants as labor. However, the comparative shortage of arable, tillable land in what would become Philipstown and the Village of Cold Spring probably meant that less agricultural labor was needed. Enslaved and indentured people, therefore, may have been fewer in this vicinity. Instead, the land here was valuable for its natural resources. Being able to rely on such commodities as timber and iron ore meant that the Cold Spring was able to prosper when the economies of surrounding areas, such as New Paltz, Kingston and Newburgh, faltered after the abolition of slavery statewide in 1827 and in economic downturns Cold Spring and its surroundings have rich Revolutionary War History. The fabled chain that stretched across the Hudson to thwart the British traveling northward was placed to the south of the Village. Benedict Arnold was in command at West Point, across the Hudson, when he committed his act of treason and fled first by boat and then on foot through nearby Garrison. Washington’s army camped on a site near the present day Haldane Central School, and the cemetery on Mountain Avenue contains the graves of soldiers and officers of the Continental Army. Legend says that Washington drank from a spring in what would one day be the Village, declaring it to be refreshingly cold; this tale is often cited as the source of the Village’s name.

Following Independence, in 1815, the Philipstown (later spelled Philipstwon) Turnpike Company completed a toll road that connected the river landing at Cold Spring with Patterson, at the northeast corner of Putnam



RESOURCE GUIDE II: A BRIEF HISTORY OF COLD SPRING AND ITS BUILT ENVIRONMENT (cont.)

County. This road would become Main Street in the Village of Cold Spring, and Route 301 to the east of the Village. With a primary road cut through and the local economy thriving, land was ready for development. Frederick Philipse laid out the street grid recognizable in the lower Village today, and began to sell off parcels. In 1817, he sold land to the south of Main Street to the West Point Foundry Association. The establishment of a foundry in Cold Spring would solidify the Village's place in our national story, and forever shape the community in ways great and small. By the 1830s, New York City-bound trading sloops docked weekly at Cold Spring to pick up foundry products, as well as natural resources delivered to the waterfront via the turnpike. This trade connectivity positioned Cold Spring well when the Erie Canal opened in 1825—the turnpike and river link gave Cold Spring an edge over other Hudson River towns to compete against the Canal's efficient trade upstate.

The establishment of the foundry came at the beckoning of President James Madison. With the Wars of Independence and 1812 in recent memory, Madison charged American entrepreneurs with establishing the industrial self-sufficiency of the young nation—particularly for the production of weaponry. One of those entrepreneurs, Gouverneur Kemble, incorporated the West Point Foundry Association in 1818, transforming the still-forming Village into an industrial powerhouse. Cold Spring was perfectly located for a thriving foundry. Iron ore could be mined from the nearby mountains, which also yielded lumber for charcoal to produce pig iron.

Local workers were trained to work the foundry, but their numbers were swelled by Irish mechanics spirited from the Belfast docks in the guise of ordinary laborers. Great Britain had embargoed the export of skilled artisans to America, and the Foundry Association managed to thwart it. The expertise of these Irish, Scot, English and German mechanics was an essential factor in the success of the Foundry throughout its nearly 100-year service. Around the turn of the century, other immigrants, including Italians and Eastern Europeans, came to Cold Spring to work the Foundry, as well as on the Carskill aqueduct system that would supply New York City. Today, the Foundry site is preserved as part of the Historic District in the West Point Foundry Preserve.

The construction of housing for foundry workers represented the first building boom in Cold Spring. Mr. Kemble developed semi-detached row houses along Furnace and Kemble Streets, and on scattered sites north of main and nearer the riverfront. These humble, small scale structures on narrow streets established the working-class character of the lower Village. Meanwhile, Kemble and other senior Foundry Association bosses built manses on bluffs and hillsides that allowed them to capture views up and down river, long prized by the Hudson River School painters. Paulding Avenue has a collection of these grand houses, as does Morris Avenue.

In 1837, finishing operations for the foundry shifted to New York City. The rail line connecting Cold Spring to the City and world markets was run upriver in 1848. Production at the foundry expanded beyond ordnance to included stove boxes, bells, furniture, sugar milling equipment, locomotives, steamboats, even water mains for New York, Boston and Chicago. Significantly for our Historic District, cast iron building components were forged at the foundry. Some appear on our Main Street, and many others make up facades in the famed Cast Iron District of New York City's SOHO neighborhood. Indeed, Cold Spring's foundry hastened the nation's progress as an industrial power with modern infrastructure.

In the Civil War, Foundry Vice President and West Point graduate Robert Parker Parrott developed rifled guns, which are said to have shifted the tide of the War in favor of the Union Army. Parrott Guns were

RESOURCE GUIDE II: A BRIEF HISTORY OF COLD SPRING AND ITS BUILT ENVIRONMENT (cont.)

produced in the Foundry, and their success spurred a wave of growth in the Village. Many men came to Cold Spring to work the Foundry, and housing was in short supply. Parrott developed long blocks of worker cottages along what is today known as Parsonage Street, and slightly later, middle class housing along a parallel street named for him. Portions of these streets are within the Historic District.

In this same period, shops proliferated on Main Street, along with hotels, saloons, a bakery and a blacksmith. Modest frame structures from the mid-19th Century survive on upper Main Street and the north side of lower Main, but the destruction of the lower south side by fires 1862 and 1875 made way for more elaborate brick buildings in that area.

Main Street forms the Village's commercial spine, rising upslope from the river shore to the Village boundary. It is the kind of picturesque street that people imagine when they hear "Main Street": a mix of largely two-and three-story wood-frame and brick mixed-use structures with commercial uses on the first floor and apartments above. Large plate glass windows show off merchants' wares and decorative cornices trumpet the Village's early economic success. Though the range of offerings found on Main Street has changed from dry goods and variety stores to boutiques and antique shops, the street retains its bustling commercial heritage.

The railroad not only took Cold Spring's products to market, but it brought new populations to the Village. At the turn of the 19th century, the middle class was escaping New York's urban life along the lines of the expanding rail system—this was the first wave of American suburbanization. Architects and builders saw opportunity in these buyers, and built larger homes on bigger lots than could be had in the lower village—often on subdivided former estates of wealthy landowners such as the Gouverneurs and the Butterfields. The designs of these houses, some selected from pattern books, took advantage of the mechanization and mass production of the Industrial Revolution that the Foundry helped fuel. The development of balloon-frame construction allowed the imagining of fanciful rooflines and facades, and gave architects a new freedom of form.

Mass production of building materials, including nails, trusses, windows and trim, made possible the rapid construction of good quality, aesthetically pleasing houses for a broader demographic of homeowners. Although the Historic District's greatest concentration of late 19th and early 20th century houses is located in the northeast quadrant, they can also be found around the District, singly and in groups.

Cold Spring's interwar development, characterized by Colonial Revival houses on large lots, and post-World War II housing, recognizable for the minimal traditional scale and detailing of GI Bill housing built across America, are mostly located outside the bounds of the Historic District. But their commercial counterparts are found along Chestnut Street south of Main. The national trend of car-focused commerce is represented by shopping plazas. Developed in between the 1950s and 1970s—the period of Cold Spring's other large industry, the Marathon Battery Factory, which produced batteries for military use—the area contains the grocery, pharmacy, a drive through bank and other daily provisioners.

The Chestnut Street commercial core has taken on its own significance in the Historic District. It is a product of the urban planning of its own time as much as Main Street is a product of previous generations. Similarly, multi-family housing included in the Historic District tells a more recent story of growth, again following national development patterns. Since the 1980s, and especially in the last two decades, Cold Spring has seen another population shift, with urban dwellers from New York City migrating northward. As in generations past, people have come to Cold Spring seeking affordable housing, more space for growing families, and small town life. Today, Village blocks are a mix of folks who've lived in Cold Spring all their lives and those who've recently embraced Cold Spring's character and history. Lacking the major industry of previous eras,

RESOURCE GUIDE II: A BRIEF HISTORY OF COLD SPRING AND ITS BUILT ENVIRONMENT (cont.)

and without a large local commercial sector, the economy of the Village has shifted as well. Many families have at least one member who commutes to employment in New York or in other nearby metropolitan areas.

The establishment of the Historic District has increased the public's awareness of historic preservation and its value to both the housing market and to the quality of life. As property owners seek to restore and rehabilitate structures to accommodate the changing needs of their families and businesses, they look to the Design Standards to guide their choices. The Standards also guide infill construction on remaining developable lots. Around the Historic District, new structures with a contemporary character reflect the forms, mass and scale of our 18th, 19th and 20th Century architecture, while at the same time presenting the aesthetics, materials and technologies of their own times.

Indeed, Cold Spring is a living, evolving Village, anchored in its history. We have inherited an architectural and historical legacy from those who came before us, and we make our homes and livelihoods alongside it. Visitors stroll our Main Street to get a taste of the small town look and feel that so many other urban areas have long-since lost. We are blessed with a rich sense of history and a recognizable sense of place. Our architecture is an important element in that history and sense of place. We are all charged with preserving and respecting them, and continuing to tell Cold Spring's unfolding story.

The survival of Cold Spring's remarkably preserved historic character is owed to geography, economic cycles, and the foresight of residents who established a framework for historic preservation. Cold Spring is nestled between the Hudson on the west, marshland and parkland on the south, protected open spaces and mountains on the north, and another small village, Nelsonville, just one mile east of the river; there has been little room for expansion. Cold Spring's booming 19th Century industrial economy put in place much of the village we experience today.

A declining economy in the second decade of the 20th Century, and a steep drop in the 1970s and 1980s; slowed further development. Although the decline was tough on families and municipal coffers, it served to preserve Cold Spring largely as it was built. Buildings were retained, not demolished, and modifications to historic architecture were mostly cosmetic and reversible. The establishment of the local historic district in 1976, and the naming of a portion of it as a National Register District in 1982 acknowledged the dormant potential of the Village. This State and National recognition reinforced pride in local architecture and served to encourage investment in conservation and appropriate improvements.

Special thanks to Dr. Paul Otto of George Fox University.

For Further Reading:

Gibbons, Ann. Hudson Valley Roots: Slavery Played a Big Role in Hudson Valley History. Posted 2/27/2011; accessed 7/9/2017. History <http://www.dailyfreeman.com/article/DF/20110227/NEWS/302279993>

Ruttenbur, Edward, M. History of the Indian Tribes of the Hudson River. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1971.

Salomon, Julian, H. Indians of the Lower Hudson Region. Historical Society of Rockland County. New York City, NY, 1982.