

## HISTORY OF FOUNDING OF WAPPINGERS FALLS

The word Wappinger seems to have come from the Indian name Wapani, an Algonquin tribe which roamed the eastern shore of the Hudson River until the middle of the 18th century.

The creek waters have long been the chief stimulus to the growth of the village.

The Town of Wappinger, originally a part of the town of Fishkill, was erected May 20, 1875 and lies wholly within the Rombout patent, granted in 1865. Territorially, it is the smallest town in Dutchess County covering 16,025 acres, but in point of population and industrial activity it is one of the most important.

The principal village in the town is Wappingers Falls situated at the head of navigation on Wappinger Creek. The village lies on both sides of the creek having been made to include the village of Channingville by incorporation on September 22, 1871.

The first projected settlement was at the mouth of the creek in 1659 when several persons wished to migrate from Massachusetts. Access overland was difficult and permission to the right of passage through the Hudson was denied by Dutch authorities. The project was abandoned.

In 1780 The Daily Graphic of New York stated that "the present Mesier mansion, the county buildings at Clump's Corners and the flour mill were the only buildings in the place."

Peter Mesier, though not the first settler, was the first of much importance and the first whose family name has been associated with its history to the present time. He fled from France in 1685 to escape the tyranny and persecution of Louis XIV. He found refuge in

Fishkill and purchased a large tract of land said to contain some 700 acres which lay on both sides of the creek. It comprised most of the land of the present village of Wappingers Falls.

The purchase included the house now known as Mesier Homestead centered in Mesier Park. The home now houses the Wappingers Police Department and the Water Department.

#### INDUSTRIES

Before 1777, Adolphus Brewer, a miller and millwright from Holland, built the "Yellow Mill" on the east side of Wappingers Creek.

Nicholas Brewer, brother of Adolphus, built "Red Mill". Output of 100 barrels of flour per day was reported.

After May 1, 1777, these mills were purchased by Peter Mesier.

After 1787, Nicholas Brewer, Jr. and Henry TerBoss, shipbuilders, established a shipyard at the foot of McKinley Street. It would accommodate vessels drawing up to sixteen feet of water. Mathew Mesier, son of Peter, had a sloop built there to transport flour to New York. Also, a number of gunboats were built there for the United States Government in 1812.

1832 - The Dutchess Print Works were established by James Ingham of Manchester, England, for printing calico. This was the first print works in America.

1835 - The Dutchess Print Works were bought by the Dutchess Company. Thomas Garner was the principle owner. They employed over 1,000 persons with an average daily output of 25-30 tons of calicoes and shirtings.

1844 - The Franklindale Cotton Company became the property of Messrs. Garner & Co. The site and waterpower was first utilized by Benjamin Clapp, who manufactured mahogany veneering on the lower floor. The second floor was occupied by Cook & Low, makers of combs. The upper story was utilized for drying cotton goods. The cotton mill operated 10,000 spindles and produced about 250,000 yards of cloth per week. This plant was destroyed by fire in 1885.

The comb factory was later located in several places. The last site was at the foot of Fulton Street where a part of this factory still stands. It is now used for apartments but is still known as "The Comb Shop". Until recent times, jet beads and other ornaments used in the manufacturing of the combs have been dug up by children of the community.

1846 - The Clinton Company erected a building on the site of the "Yellow Mill" to manufacture cotton cloth. It was destroyed by fire in 1855 and was never rebuilt. The name existed however in the supervision of all the tenement property, numbering several hundred, rented mainly to the operators in the print works. In later years, these houses were sold.

1866 - S. W. Johnson became partner with Mr. Garner. Shortly after, Mr. Garner died and the estate was inherited by his son, William. The business, under the name of Garner Company was continued by Mr. Johnson until his death in December 1881. The three Garner daughters, who had married titles, were not interested in continuing the business. In 1909, the print works and bleachery were sold to Derring & Milliken and became known as The Dutchess Bleachery. They discontinued printing materials but continued as a bleachery and dye works. After

World War I, it was run on a partnership plan, in which the employees shared equally with the company. This was the first venture of its kind and was very successful for a number of years. As work was affected by the depression, the partnership plan was dissolved by a 100% vote of the employees.

1955 - The Bleachery discontinued operations and the property was sold. It was a great blow to the economy of the village.

1873 - The R.J. Stuart Foundry located north of Drake's drawbridge having moved there from Hughsonville where it was established by William Taylor before 1852. It had been sold to Hunt & Disbrow at that time.

1871 - Sweet, Orr & Company established a plant for the making of overalls, sack coats, and jackets. James Orr and his two nephews, Clayton E. and Clinton W. Sweet, came here from California. It was one of several factories. Local employees numbered 250 and the weekly output was 1,000 dozen pairs of overalls. In 1912 they were advertised as "the world famous manufactory of overalls". Two-thirds of its employees were women. This parent plant closed in 1958.

#### MERCHANTS

As late as 1832, there was only one store in Wappingers.

In 1830, Benjamin Clapp erected it on Market Street.

In 1870, Joseph D. Harcourt engaged in milling and ice business, at Faulkner Mill near Hughsonville. His two sons, J. & J. T. Nichols Harcourt associated with him and continued the business of general merchandise.

From 1847 to 1876, John DuBois was a prominent merchant dealing in dry goods and groceries.

William G. King commenced mercantile business about 1846.

Other merchants were:

A. W. Armstrong, dealer in house furnishings and opened the first stove store in 1846.

James Roy opened the first drug store in 1848.

J. H. Redfield, furniture dealer and undertaker.

Peter Mesier had a store in his home. There the angry housewives staged "The Wappingers Tea Party" when they, as a group, demanded that he lower the price of tea.

#### VILLAGE LIBRARY

First established in 1876 in the original home of Abram Mesier at the corner of Main and Market Streets where its limited accommodations were soon outgrown.

In 1887, the present Grinnell Library was established at the crown of Main Street hill. It was the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Irving Grinnell and is one that the Village can be justly proud. Our work in the compiling of this booklet was greatly enhanced by the assistance of the present librarian, Miss Frances Drace, whose help is greatly appreciated.

It is the sixth oldest library in New York State and the second oldest in Hudson Valley.

#### THE BRIDGE

On February 28, 1819, a freshet of extraordinary force destroyed many mills on the banks of the creek and carried away every bridge from Salt Point to the Hudson. The Main Street bridge was immediately rebuilt. It was a covered wooden structure with windows on both sides. This was

replaced by a stone bridge in 1852 which was widened in 1884 from 30 feet to 60 feet.

### CHURCHES

Originally, the people of the Village of various denominations held their services in homes of those interested in establishing a church. The following churches were formally founded:

- 1833 - Zion Protestant Episcopal Church
- 1838 - Franklindale Baptist Church
- 1845 - St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church
- 1845 - Methodist Episcopal Church
- 1848 - Presbyterian Church

### SCHOOLS

The first school was started in a building at Main and Church Streets in Channingville, which was owned by the Dutchess Company, in about 1866. It was known as the Union Free School No. 1. Today it is a centralized district with its main building, a fine structure, on Remsen Avenue.

Other schools of the district are the James S. Evans Elementary School on South Road, and the Vassar Road Elementary School.

### ROADS

The Highway Law of 1713 read: "If the commissioners for the County of Orange and Dutchess County see cause to have any roads laid out for a wagon road, the inhabitants of said counties shall be hereby obliged to clear the same."

### STREETS

In 1872, Mr. Edward Morris went into the real estate business and built Goring Hall where he opened a drug store. Various proprietors have con-

tinued a drug business which is now operated as the Liggett Drug Store.

He sold much of the property of the Mesier estate which resulted in the opening of a number of important streets and the erection of business places and homes. He helped incorporate the Bank of Wappingers and was responsible for the laying out of the road to New Hamburg along the lower creek as a public road instead of a toll road as was chartered by the legislature.

On an 1850 map of Wappingers, Mill Street was lined on both sides with the buildings of a Clinton Manufacturing Company which likely gave it its name.

Spring Street is said to be named for a spring on the corner which is under the present library building.

Academy Street was opened in 1870. It does not cross South Avenue in a straight line because, at the time, the entrance to Benjamin Clapp's estate occupied the southwest corner. This estate was marked by the gray granite posts which now stand as a gateway into the grounds of Zion Episcopal Church. In the 1900's, the Clapp home was occupied by superintendents of the Bleachery.

South Avenue was first called Mesier Lane, then Broadway and finally South Avenue. As late as 1870, it was known as Broadway but the dates for other changes have not been found. In the 1890's and early 1900's, it was known as Lovers' Lane, though not officially, for it was a popular spot on evenings and Sundays for strolling couples.

We have been told that the river road from Peekskill through Beacon to Wappingers was known as Broadway. This was a section of the road which was to be a direct line from New York City to Albany, all of which was to be known as Broadway.

James S. Roy, as village president, supervised the curbing and grading of streets and the laying out

of water mains. The purchase and laying out of Mesier Park was mainly effected through his efforts.

### UNITED STATES POST OFFICE

First established in New Hamburg around 1813 and known as the Wappingers Creek Post Office.

In 1847, a post office was established in "a little community" (assumed to be Hughsonville, though not specifically so stated). The inhabitants had previously obtained their mail at Middlebush where a post office was maintained about 1824 and was kept by Mr. Francher, father of Judge Francher of New York City.

The Mesier family favored the name Wappingers Falls for the community. The Post Master General under President Zachary Taylor changed the name to Wappingers Falls Post Office from Wappingers Creek Post Office in 1849.

The original site of the Post Office was in a store just west of the bridge, however, the location was frequently changed for with the appointment of a new post master the office would be moved. This practice continued until 1940 when a permanent site was chosen by President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the corner of South Avenue and East Main Street. At his suggestion, a field stone building was erected which was a copy of the original Mesier Homestead.

A large number of boxes were installed for no deliveries were made. In July 1954, it was made a first class post office with three delivery routes in the village and three rural routes that now cover 101 miles a day.

### MURALS IN WAPPINGERS FALLS POST OFFICE

These are the work of Henry Billings of New York. The theme is the falls and gorge of the creek.

On the northwest wall, the first mill established

in 1780 is depicted. It introduces two figures, the Marquis de Chastellux, an early traveler who recorded the beauty of the falls, and Peter Mesier, owner of the "Yellow Mill" whose 18th century home inspired the architecture of the present Post Office.

On the southwest wall is shown the textile mill and stone bridge of 100 years later.

Henry Billings is represented by paintings in the Museum of Living Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, Museum of Science and Industry, Murals in Rockefeller Center, Murals in Medford, Massachusetts, Lake Placid, and New York City Post Offices.

-Taken from Mr. Clinton Clapp's Articles

#### BANKS

A National Bank was formed and failed before 1869 at an unknown location. This furniture and equipment was purchased by the Wappingers Falls Savings Bank which was incorporated on April 23, 1869. For many years they were located in the Masonic Building on Mill Street. When they moved to their new modern building, a few doors away, the old equipment was left in what is now the Town Clerk's Office. The old safe bears the name of National Bank and is still in use.

1871 - Wappingers Falls Bank was organized but failed in 1885.

The National Bank of Wappingers Falls was incorporated on February 1, 1909 with a capital of \$25,000. It is now affiliated with the First National Bank of Poughkeepsie.

#### THE PRESS

The Wappingers Falls Daily Times, established about 1867, continued some four or five months by C. G. and S. Coutant. Press work was done in Mattewan.

The Wappingers Chronicle, established October 26, 1869 was owned and published under the name of Winchell & Dougherty.

In 1872, Dougherty purchased Winchell's interest and continued until September 25, 1880, at which time he sold it to A. E. Benedict. The name was changed to The Weekly Chronicle. It was a Republican paper.

The Bulletin, which was started on December 17, 1874 by George W. Winchell and S. Roe, Jr. published for about a year. It was a Democratic weekly.

The Wappinger Era, a Democratic weekly, was established in 1876-1877 by George W. Winchell. It was discontinued in the Summer of 1878; revived after fifteen months by George W. Winchell and S. H. Homan. It was again discontinued in 1881.

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#### INTERESTING GLEANINGS

Wappingers lies in the middle of Hudson Valley, the longest valley in Eastern United States extending from Alabama to the Province of Quebec. Marine deposits contain marine fossils and remains of ancient sea life.

The Duke and Dutchess of Marlboro are said to have ridden through Wappingers with two footmen on their tally-ho. They stopped to picnic and change horses at Mesier Park but were told to move on by the local constabulary.

A red sand stone horse trough of six or eight sides once stood at Main and Mill Streets. Used as a platform for speakers, both Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke from it.

A soap factory once stood near Clump's Corners. Clump's Corners is the land at the junction of East Main Street and Route 9, going west to Remsen Avenue. Though no record of a deed has been found, it was known to include many acres.

When the first trolley ran it was all lighted up.  
The whole town turned out to see it.

New Hamburg once carried the world's pennant for ice boating. People came from all over the east to watch races. "Northern Light" from Poughkeepsie finally won a pennant.

Black Tom, a slave owned by Peter Mesier, planted the maples and other trees around the Gault home. This was the home of Maria Mesier, daughter of Peter.

The Old Stone House on Old Troy Road was once known as the House at Farmer's Landing. The walls are 24" thick, has three huge fireplaces, and the bricks in the peaks were brought from Holland as ballast. It was fired upon during the Revolution from the river.

William K. Roy was instrumental in securing the telephone and electric trolley lines.

The main road from New York City to Albany was known as The King's Highway.

Channingville is derived from the Channing family who owned a farm on which it lies (1886). Formerly it was known as Ednams and Ednamsville. Eagan's Opera House was built there in 1876. It seated 500 people.

John Crilley, a cooper, built the first brick building on either side of the creek.

First meeting of the newly formed Town of Wappingers was held in Brower Brothers Wagon Shop on March 7, 1876.

Dr. Peter D. Schenk was the first doctor to

locate here in 1820. He continued his practice here until his death.

The Dahlia Society held annual flower shows in the O'Farrell Opera House.

Power's Recreation Park was the scene for tandem bicycle races on a 15 mile track.

The trolley cars from Poughkeepsie had difficulty in keeping to hour schedule in spite of the use of bigger and better cars.

A boat owned by Captain George Terwilliger operated between Wappingers and Newburgh for carrying freight and passengers. It was known as ~~The Messenger~~. Mr. Connelly later ran The Petrel

When 21 volunteers departed for Camp Kelly on August 14, 1862, the operatives of the Dutchess Print Works met to plan means of support for the families of those who might be drafted under recent government orders. It was agreed to contribute two percent of monthly earnings.

1883 - The Zion Church Sewing School met every Saturday to teach the children of the village to sew.

The bell at Zion Church was secretly installed at night to be rung at the early morning Christmas service to the surprise of all.

In 1885, the village was lighted by gas.

On the outskirts of Wappingers stood the famous model house of Orson Fowler which he planned, wrote about and finally built after a decade of work. Its outstanding feature was its form for it is an octagon rising five stories from an oval knowll. "The twenty-

foot square glass-roofed cupola, crowning the stair well, was eighty feet above the ground, and its windows framed a changing panorama that included vast reaches of the gleaming river and the spires of sixteen towns. Below it nearly a hundred rooms bore witness to the builder's varied interests and his architectural theories."- Carl Cramer, "The Hudson"

Known as Fowler's Folly, it was completed in 1858 and builders came from far and near to see "A Home for All" and to copy its construction. Churches, schoolhouses, a horsebarn, a smokehouse, and a "seance chamber feeling that eight-angled walls would be easier for spirit visitors to penetrate than four" came into being.

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#### THANK YOU

The committee wishes to express its appreciation to all those who helped them to compile this modest booklet of a history of Wappingers Falls. Who knows but what this might be of interest to some venturesome group to continue the study to bring it up to today's living in the village?

Our thanks to Mayor Joseph A. McCloskey, and the Park Commissioners for the use of Mesier Park for the Wappingers Garden Club's Card Party. The project was our contribution to New York's Year of History. 1959 marks the 350th Hudson-Champlain Anniversary Celebration.

Our thanks to those patrons of our project. The club appreciates your response to our efforts and welcomes your interest in our organization. We extend a cordial invitation to attend our meetings and a possible future membership.

Our thanks to the #427 Post of the American Legion who so generously cooperated with us to allow the use of their building in case of rain for without this help our party could have been a "complete wash-out".

Our thanks to our former President, Mrs. Gertrude Willson, and our present President, Mrs. Adelaide Ries, for their support and confidence in the committee.

Our thanks to the club members for their assistance and especially to Miss Angela Mazzeo who so capably handled the sale of tickets.

Our thanks to all who helped make this venture a success.

We wish to express our gratitude to Mrs. Beatrice Sheffield of Poughkeepsie who graciously consented to memograph our work.

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- PEOPLE CONSULTED

Sophie and Christopher Hummel  
Fannie D. Moore  
Edward Scofield  
Mr. and Mrs. Martense Cornell  
Irene Cavagnaro  
Frances E. Drace  
Kenneth Van Voorhis  
Henry Townsend  
R. Malcolm Hunter, Postmaster

COMMITTEE

Carolyn P. Wixson  
Edith Valente  
Louise Crawford  
Beatrice M. Marble, Chairman