

Historic and Community Character

Subcommittee Members: Virginia Augerson and Town Historical Society

Key Observations:

- The Town of Washington is home to two historic buildings that are listed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places.
- There are a number of additional sites that have been identified as outstanding examples of regional architecture. These sites should consider applying for designation on the National and State Registers of Historic Places.

History of Washington

According to the 1987 Master Plan, *the Town of Washington was formed on March 7, 1788. General George Washington was the great hero of the hour, and the next year he was elected the first President of the United States. During the American War of the Revolution, General Washington made camp under the huge cottonwood tree that stood at the place which has been called Washington Hollow ever since. The blue cloth used in making the coats of the uniforms worn by the officers in General Washington's army was woven by Philip Hart at his cotton mill in Hart's Village (now Millbrook).*

With all of these natural things reminding the people of George Washington, it was only natural that they named the new town in his honor. It was originally made up of about 67,000 acres, which lay mostly in the Great Nine partner's land grant. However, in 1793, the Town of Stanford was formally established as a distinct municipality and Washington took its current shape (consisting of about 36,000 acres).

In several places, the land provided a beautiful view of the Catskill Mountains in the distance. Its soil was fertile and well watered. Its valleys were afforded protection by the surrounding hills. Such natural amenities attracted more settlers to the area. Among the names of the early settlers in the Town of Washington were Titus, Sherman, Allen, Sackett, Northrop, Boyce, Gifford, Marcy, Cutler, Swift, Sutherland, Haviland, Mabbett, Walsey, Mott, White, Hammond, Thorne, Hart, Holms and Sweet. The early settlers raised grain, hauled it in wagons to Poughkeepsie, put it on sloops, and sent it down the river for sale in New York City. They also raised cattle, sheep and turkey, and transported them to the market in New York City first by boat and later by train.

Irish immigrants arriving in the mid-19th century began the tradition of horse breeding that characterizes much of the Town today. Raising race horses and riding horses has become a very profitable business since those days, with a least five such farms in the Town of Washington in 1986.

George Hunter Brown of Brown Brothers Brokers in New York City built the Newburgh, Dutchess and Columbia Railroad through Dutchess County. In 1869, it came through Millbrook, a new station named after Mr. Brown's own homestead. The railroad brought the county out of its wilderness years and ushered in an era of summer boarders from the City. Mr. Brown also built a milk factory in 1870 in Harts Village which enabled farmers to carry on a profitable dairy business.

The great estates of Daheim, Altamont, Cary, Thorne and others grew up around Millbrook. At the turn of the century, there were more estates of millionaires around Millbrook than around any other small village in the Country. During the Depression, these local estates retained their hired help and enabled many families to survive.

In 1907 May Friend Bennett purchased Halcyon hall, (built as an elite hotel in 1893) and established Bennett School in 1908. That boarding school later became a junior college until its operations were ended in 1977. The Bennett School and the Millbrook School (which is actually in Stanford) gave the area a unique aspect of private education.

There are many remnants of the elements that have distinguished the Town's history. Estate homes, historic farm houses and barns, distinctive stone walls, educational institutions, and churches all remain as reminders of the pattern and progress of local development. In addition, certain of the cultural resources (many of which are concentrated in the Village of Millbrook), continue to serve Town residents as they have previous generations. The Gifford House, the Cardinal Hayes Home for Children, the community College, Cottonwood Inn, and the Town Hall are particularly significant. Some of these facilities involved adaptation of older buildings for different current uses. There are also new developments, such as the greenhouse complex at Cary Arboretum and the Farm and Home Center, that represent continued investment in (and appreciation of) the natural environment that distinguishes the Town.

Certainly, some of the most valued natural resources are the scenic views that characterize the rural landscape. Some of these include: Route 82 and Verbank Road north of Unionvale; Chestnut Ridge Road and Hammond Hill Road; Bangall Road near Daheim Road; North Mabbettsville Road near Andrew Haight Road; and Bontecou Road and Tower Hill Road just east of Route 44.

Many areas have potential for designation as historic districts, scenic or recreation districts, or environmental protection districts.

National Register of Historic Places Listing

The National Historic Preservation Act and New York State Historic Preservation Act establish criteria by which buildings, sites, and structures are determined historic. In order to be designated historic, and listed in the National and State Registers of Historic Places, buildings, structures, sites and neighborhoods are evaluated through a formal survey and nomination process, and, if determined significant based on the established criteria. Listed resources are afforded a basic level of protection from federal and state actions, but local regulation is needed to prevent demolition and other actions.

National and State Register-listed historic resources in the Town of Washington include the following properties:

- Lynfield (the Milton Conrad Ham House), located at South Road east of at Tyrell Road in the Town of Washington, is a 23-acre farmstead comprised of an large Italianate frame farmhouse built in C. 1871 and includes two contributing barns (late 19th century), a non-contributing guest house, a small non-contributing former office building, and a non-contributing barn. Lynfield was erected by Milton Ham. It is architecturally significant as a distinguished Italianate style farmhouse in rural Dutchess County. The farmhouse displays a variety of distinctive Italianate style decoration and is distinguished by its unusual C-shaped configuration and its high level of integrity of design and materials.

The significance of the farmhouse is enhanced by the survival of two late nineteenth century barns and a 23-acre portion of its original acreage.

- Nine partners Meeting House and Cemetery, located at NY Route 343 and Church Street in the Village of Millbrook, is a two-story vernacular brick Quaker meetinghouse built 1780. The cemetery is fairly large in relation to other burial grounds associated with meeting homes and encompasses approximately twelve acres and contains hundreds of stones. The Nine Partners Meeting House is architecturally and historically significant as an outstanding example of a traditional Quaker meeting house that recalls the growth and development of the Society of Friends in Dutchess County. It is one of the oldest Quaker settlements in the county. The Meeting House had a seating capacity of 1,000 and is little changed since first constructed. It remains a focal point for the entire town.

The following locations have been cited as outstanding examples of regional architecture in numerous scholarly publications:

- Lithgow 1760 was the country estate of David Johnstone. It was built on land inherited from his grandfather, David Jamison, who was one of the original Nine Partner patentees (1697). It is recognized as one of the most important prerevolutionary constructions in the Hudson River Valley.
- St. Peter's Lithgow, 1880, is a Carpenter Gothic / Arts & Crafts Episcopal Church that anchors Lithgow, a historic hamlet of clustered early to 19th century homes. It is the only Episcopal Church in the diocese of NY that is still on a dirt road, amid stone walls, working farms and rural vistas.
- Phillip Hart House, c. 1800, is an outstanding example of Federal architecture. It has been little altered since first built for Philip Hart, an early manufacturer who took advantage of the local water power generated by the nearby East Branch of the Wappinger Creek. It is currently in the process of being nominated for the National Register. The cluster of neighboring homes and converted mills is known as Harts Village.
- Thorndale, c. 1848; 1900 (major renovation) is a country estate originally built for Jonathan Thorne around 1848. This Italianate structure was expanded and reinvented in the Georgian-Federal Revival style about 1900. The entire estate consists of numerous period outbuildings, gatehouses and landscape details that have been in continuous use for generations of Thornes. The Thorne Family has been closely associated with the Town of Washington for over 200 years.
- Killearn Farm, c. 1833, originally the Tristram Coffin House, on Killearn Road, was singled out by Helen Wilkinson Reynolds in 1931 as being one of the best expressions of quality workmanship of its day. Its original details and exterior embellishments are virtually unique in the Hudson River Valley. It is also known as the Maclay or Free estate, depending on the generation.

There are many other structures of note, such as Daheim (Hitchcock Estate) and Migdale, as well as numerous man-made landscape features, such as majestic estate gatehouses, impressive stone structures, miles of original stone walls, many with unique patterning and civic monuments. Several important historic road mile markers, first carved in 1804, have also survived.

Town of Washington/Village of Millbrook Historical Society

The Historical Society was established in January 1973. The purpose of the Historical Society is to discover, collect and make available to the public any material which may help to establish or illustrate the history of the Town of Washington and Village of Millbrook. It presents monthly programs for society members and the public about the Town of Washington, Village of Millbrook and Mid-Hudson Valley history as pertains to the community.

In the summer of 2007, the Society reached an agreement with the Village of Millbrook for a five year lease for archival and administrative space in the lower level of the Millbrook Village Hall. Construction of the new space was completed in March 2008. A concerted program for the collection of area historical documents, photographs, memorabilia and artifacts started in March 2008. The intent of the Society is to continue to provide educational, instructive presentations about the Town, village and local history for the foreseeable future.

Historical Subcommittee

In preparation for the Town's Comprehensive Plan, the Steering Committee established separate subcommittees each charged with direct responsibility for data collection, analysis, and making recommendations to the Steering Committee on topic areas typically covered in a Comprehensive Plan. Some observations on the Washington's history from the Subcommittee include the following:

- Historic recognition – no limitations on owner use; history of individual parcels (500 designated homes) important landscape features and stone walls
- Stone walls built for land clearance by farmers – late Italian masons brought in to build stone walls and homes.