

Town of Wappinger

Wappinger although the youngest and smallest town in Dutchess County was industrially and in point of population and wealth; one of the most important. This town was also connected quite dramatically with some of the earliest and most interesting episodes in the history of Dutchess County.

On February 8, 1682; a license was issued to allow the purchase of lands from the Wappinger Indians whose name still remains as the name of our town. The Wappinger Indians were known to be peaceful and got along very well with the white people who came to these shores from across the Atlantic Ocean. They were members of the Eastern Woodlands tribes, which populated the eastern coast of our country from New England down to our southernmost state of Florida. The Wappinger Indians were of the Lenape peoples, a part of the Alkonquin tribe, which belonged to the Delaware Nation. The name of the tribe, "Wapani" literally translated means "opossum", an animal that still populates our area.

The three men who made the purchase of lands from the Wappinger Indians were Francis Rombout, Gulian VerPlanck, and Stephanus Van Cortlandt. You will find these names immortalized all over Dutchess County. Please note that these gentlemen are all Dutch. This very important piece of land was known as the Rombout Patent.

The town of Wappinger was carved from the Town of Fishkill on May 20, 1875. It lies along the West border of the county and is bounded on the North by LaGrange, on the south by the Town of Fishkill, on the East by Sprout Creek, and on the West by the Wappinger Creek as well as the Hudson River. The highest point is Mount Hope, which is a ½ mile south of Meyers Corners. Next to Fishkill, it is the most populous town in Dutchess County.

The very first projected settlement in this area was at the mouth of the Wappinger Creek when settlers from the Massachusetts Bay Colony attempted to establish a settlement. However, the project had to be abandoned because the access overland was too difficult and permission to "right of passage" through the Hudson River was denied by the Dutch authorities.

The creek waters located within the village of Wappingers Falls were the chief stimulus to the development and growth of this town although the growth originally was primarily within the village. A mere "s" stands between the village of Wappinger's Falls and the town of Wappinger. The "s" in the name of the village simply shows possession of the falls.

The first documented white settlers on the Wappinger side of the Creek were the Brewer (spelled many different ways) brothers from Holland. Nicholas and Adolphus built and operated two very prosperous mills several years before the American Revolution. One was a saw mill and the other was a four mill producing over 100 barrels a day.

One prominent early settler of Wappinger was Peter Mesier, a native of New Amsterdam who had fled France because of the bitter persecutions of King Louis XIV against all Protestants. Peter Mesier was a French Huguenot and had come to this country for religious freedom. However, the reason that Peter Mesier had left New Amsterdam to travel north was because he wanted to find a more peaceful site to settle down. He was a British sympathizer, a Tory. While in Wappingers Falls, however, he was not overwhelmingly welcomed as is demonstrated in the "Wappingers Tea Party".

The Marquis DeChastellux wrote of our town in his diary while passing through the area in December of 1780. The Marquis wrote describing the falls in the village, " the view is beautiful and extended to the creek and the fall of the Wapping."

During the Revolutionary War, the Town of Wappinger was made memorable by the presence of portions of the American Army. After 1787, a shipyard was established at the foot of McKinley Street in the village and was able to accommodate vessels drawing up to 16 feet of water. During the War of 1812, a shipyard was in very active operation along the Wappinger Creek where many gunboats were being constructed.

Although Wappingers Falls was the hub of activities for the surrounding area, it was not extremely concentrated populationwise. The population of the town was spread out over a rather large area most engaged in farming. The town of Wappinger was comprised of many small hamlets, which because of distance and transportation of the time had to be more or less self-sufficient. Each hamlet had it's own one-room school, a blacksmith shop, post office and usually a hotel or tavern perhaps even one church. The town was still largely a farming community well into the 19th century. Many of these hamlets have disappeared leaving only their names: Middlebush, Meyers Corners, Hughsonville, New Hackensack, and Low Point also known as Chelsea.

Along Route 9 as we know it or the "King's Highway" as it was originally known, one can still find milestone markers preserved. There is one located on Rt. 9 between Wappingers and Fishkill. These milestones were instituted by Benjamin Franklin to be used to determine postage payment. At that time, the person receiving the letter paid the postage, and it was figured out by way of these mile markers.

During the 19th. Century (1800's), the Town of Wappinger was still primarily agricultural with the largest village (Wappingers Falls) very much a manufacturing center for all of Dutchess County.

Anyone who can trace their roots back within the Town of Wappinger will find a varied experience with our settlers coming first from Holland followed by England and France. Later immigrants came from Ireland, Germany and Italy predominately although there were other immigrants also.

Wappinger was and has remained very community-minded with many parades and local celebrations in which all the organizations, churches and societies would participate.

**Prepared 11/11/02 for Wappinger Website
Credit Brenda Von Burg, daughter former Supervisor Louis Diehl
Longer more detailed version available***