

# A Land of Peace

THE EARLY HISTORY OF SPARTA,  
A LANDING TOWN ON THE HUDSON

New Edition with Added Illustrations

by Philip Field Horne

Ossining, New York  
The Jug Tavern of Sparta, Inc.  
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## FOREWORD

If you turn westward toward the Hudson while driving along Route 9 near the sprawling Arcadian Shopping Center in the Village of Ossining, you are soon presented with a surprise which delights the eye. There, in the space of two blocks, is a tiny community called Sparta. Houses of an intimate scale cluster closely as though to reinforce their unity. Their histories go back as much as 180 years. As you walk the streets of Sparta, the houses seem within reach, warm, and homelike. There is little grandeur to Sparta, except the river vista, and indeed, it was a modest community in its day. But it reminds us that a village can be pleasing without being elegant.

The survival of Sparta in its present form is a rarity in the New York suburbs. Unsuccessful in its urban aspirations, its character changed repeatedly as waves of migration found it an accessible goal. But its separation from the Village of Ossining until this century and the lack of a railroad station prevented substantial growth. Although altered by Frank Vanderlip's "restoration" half a century ago, it remains closer to its form in the Federal era than any other Westchester village or town.

The objective of this short history is a modest one. We wish to present a picture of Sparta's growth and change, using the words and opinions of its residents and visitors as much as possible. Because Sparta has never been a corporate entity, any kind of historical study focusing on economy or population will be hindered by the lack of statistics. This book simply gathers what is available, and makes as few judgments as possible. Nonetheless, the story is an interesting one. We hope it will enhance your enjoyment of the Sparta Historic District.

Special thanks are deserved by Mrs. Marion Cormier and Miss Greta Cornell of the Ossining Historical Society; by many members of the Heritage Group of the Junior League of Westchester-on-Hudson, who are largely responsible for locating the nineteenth-century newspaper sources; and by W. Arthur Slater for the use of maps from his collection.

Finally a special debt is owed Ms. Patricia Day of Stein and Day for the design, typography, and layout of this book and for her invaluable assistance in arranging for its publication.

To  
NANCY C. CAMPBELL  
skilled teacher of teachers  
this book is dedicated  
with thanks for her guidance

COVER IMAGE: Sketch of Sparta from Mount Murray (1875),  
by Ezra B. Hunt (1850–1914). *Ossining Historical Society Museum*.

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## PHILIPSBURG

The United States has been called “a nation of immigrants.” The coastal and river towns have generally received the greatest numbers of newcomers through three and a half centuries. One community whose history was influenced by immigration over a long period is Sparta, a hamlet on the Hudson River in the Village of Ossining.

The Native Americans were here before us all, of course, and in the Sparta area they were called the Sint Sincks. By white man’s law they gave up their land on August 24, 1685 to Frederick Philipse.<sup>1</sup> Philipse was an especially interesting case of the rise of an immigrant, for he had been born the son of a slater in a small Dutch town in 1626. He arrived in New Amsterdam while in his twenties and labored as a carpenter. Over a period of years he acquired property, married a wealthy widow, and became a successful merchant. In 1674 he was accounted the richest man in New York City and soon entered the colonial government. He had begun to acquire property on the mainland in what was to become Westchester County, and by 1682 he had erected a mill near the mouth of the Pocantico, opening his lands there to the production of flour for the export trade. The purchase of 1685 completed his acquisitions between the Spuyten Duyvil and the Croton River; it was confirmed to his son Philip by Gov. Thomas Dongan on January 12, 1686.<sup>2</sup>

A royal patent was issued in the name of the reigning monarchs, William and Mary, on June 12, 1693, creating the “Lordship or Mannour of Philipsborough,” encompassing Philipse’s Westchester purchases and designating him as its first Lord.<sup>3</sup> Along with the great wealth implicit in the ownership of such a tract of land and the privileges granted to him by the manorial patent, Frederick Philipse faced the task of attracting settlers to live on his land to clear it and, as soon as possible, to plant and harvest marketable commodities, especially wheat.

The earliest records of the Old Dutch Church of Sleepy Hollow tell us something about the settlement of the manor, which seems to have begun near Tarrytown and Hastings about the time the mill was built. Dirck Storm began the record book in 1715. Storm had come to Philipsburg about 1704, after about a decade in Tappan where he had served as *voorzesser* of the church. As translated and reconstructed at the turn of this century, Storm’s narrative of the church relates:

After the above mentioned Lord Frederick Philipse had bought and come into possession of his land tract, he contracted with a number of people to come and live upon it without charge, that the land might be quickly put to use and settled.<sup>4</sup>

John Anstey, a clerk reporting on the Philipse’s claim for losses during the Revolutionary War, wrote in 1786 of a somewhat later arrangement:

The whole was occupied, but not all cultivated, nor all settled at one time, but by Degrees; In old Philipses Time, any person who had a mind to sit down upon the Land, was allowed so to do, upon the Condition of cultivating it, and paying what was frequently known by the Name of Tithe, which was a Rent payable not always in the Proportion of one Tenth of the annual produce, but diversely . . . But there was one common stipulation to which they were all equally bound, namely, to carry the corn to the Landlord’s Mill, and also that all the Timber, cut on the Estate, and sawed into plank and Joice, should be sawed at his Mill . . .<sup>5</sup>

While abundant land was available elsewhere for purchase. Philipse’s terms were attractive to many of the landless families living in the New York area. To learn the names and histories of the earliest white settlers of the Sparta vicinity, we must look ahead in time to the first document that gives farm boundaries on the manor: the Road Commissioners’ record, made in September 1723, marking the course of a “a publick highway,” now the Albany Post Road. It describes the bounds of the road after crossing “Crootens River”:

at a place called & known by ye name of the Low Land crossing ye sd River into the Mannor of Phillipsburg all the aforementioned Road being four Rods wide Continuing ye sd Highway from the last mentioned place leading through the Mannor of Phillipsburg as ye trees are now marked to ye westward of ffrancis Besleys house taking part of ye Land within stones for ye highway then to Roberts Brook across Robert Williamss clear Land on the West side where his Barrak now stands and so along by marked trees till it comes to a pleasant Hill down the sd Hill crossing Sink-sink Run, Rising another pleasant Hill Then along the side of the Hill till it comes into John Van Tesels ffield then along till it comes to Charles Davis his ffield and so along the inside of his field til it comes to a swamp then across ye end of ye swamp to ffrans Van Dycks ffence . . .<sup>6</sup>

From this record we can determine that the field of Charles Davis along which the Albany Post Road ran was just north of Sparta Brook, and the fence of Frans Van Dyck a little south of it. These two men are identifiable through church records and other means, and Davis appears to have been one of the original settlers on the Sparta riverfront.

## THE FOUNDING FAMILIES

Charles Davis was the English form of the name Carel Davids. Carel was the son of Jean Davids and Esther Vincent, Huguenot refugees from France. Jean was living on the island of St. Christopher in the West Indies about 1670, at the time he married Esther, a native of the Ile de Ré in France, then living on St. Martin. Soon afterward, they settled at Laval, near Montreal, where some of their children were born. Jean was a *coureur de bois*, living among the Indians and trading in furs. His trade brought him to New York province, and by 1682, when they applied for Letters of Naturalization in the English colony, the Davids family was living at Kingston. After 1687 they removed to Newtown on Long Island. Carel, born in “Canida” according to church records, left his family to settle on Philipsburg along with his brother David and sister Angelique before August 2, 1698 when he witnessed a baptism at the Dutch Church.<sup>7</sup>

At the time of their arrival, there was almost certainly still untenanted land on the river front, and they most likely settled immediately on the farm that was Carel’s home in 1723 and began clearing it.

Frans Van Dyck was a later settler; indeed, he appears to have come to Phillipsburg because of the Davids family. Frans Jacobus Van Dyck was a native of New York whose father had been brought there from Amsterdam as a small child. In 1713 he married Resule Montras, whose mother Margaret (Davids) Montras was a sister of Carel. In 1714 Frans was called a “mariner,” but about 1720 he brought his family to Philipsburg. His stay was not a long one, for by February 1739 he had become a taxpayer in Dutchess County.<sup>8</sup>

Whether Carel Davids came early enough to live “without charge” we cannot determine, but that offer was certainly not of long duration. While the Philipses appear to have benefitted more from trading in the commodities produced on the manor than from the actual ownership of the land, they retained full dominion throughout the colonial period and, without granting written leases, they charged rent for the land. The few surviving documents relating to rent practices are all within the last two decades of the manor’s existence, but a single rent receipt from the early part of the century was printed some years ago; dated February 3, 1737/38, it specifies “twelve bushels of wheat it being for a years rent due to me for the farm He lives on.”<sup>9</sup>

Whether Carel Davids paid a similar rent in a similar way cannot be established. Upon the death of Frederick Philipse in 1700, the manor had been divided, the upper portion going to his son Adolph, and the lower portion to his grandson Frederick II; the 1738 rent receipt is for a farm on the lower manor and is signed by Frederick II; hence it cannot be taken as a reliable indication of rent practice on the upper manor.

By 1732 the upper manor was functioning as a town, called by the name Philipsburg. In that year a tax list was drawn up which provides us with an overview of the population. By comparing it with the church records, about

144 heads of households can be identified, and through various records we can discern the nationalities of each family.

About forty-five percent were of Dutch origin, and about twenty-five percent were English. The French, including the Davidses, were fully thirteen percent of the community. The Germans, who arrived in the Palatine migrations from 1710 to 1720, accounted for some six percent, as did the Walloons, who had been among the earliest settlers of New Netherland. Lesser numbers of Danes, Norwegians, and Irish also lived on the manor.<sup>10</sup> Negro slaves cannot be estimated but were probably few in number as they were when first enumerated in 1755, with the exception of a large number belonging to Adolph Philipse and living on his farm at the Upper Mills.

As time went on, Carel Davids and his wife Antje Lent raised a family of nine sons and two daughters. In April, 1744 the town records refer to “Charl Davids bregs [bridge],”<sup>11</sup> clearly the Post Road bridge over Sparta Brook. After that date he disappears from the records.

## CHANGES IN CONTROL

When Adolph Philipse died in 1749, he left the upper manor to his nephew Frederick II, and Philipsburg Manor was reunited. Three years later Frederick II died, and his son, Frederick III, became Lord of the Manor.

This Frederick decided to raise the rents on the manor in 1760 and prepared a printed letter, only two copies of which survive, dated at Yonkers, February 7, 1760. In it he addresses his tenants:

This is to inform you, that I have raised the Rent of the Farm now in your Possession, in the Manor of Philipsburgh, to the Sum of [blank] which you are to pay unto me, or my Order, on the [blank] Day of December, annually, at the usual Place; and if you observe and fulfil the Conditions hereafter mentioned, and punctually pay your Rent on the above appointed Day, I shall not for the future raise your Rent.<sup>12</sup>

A copy of the rent roll prepared at this time, dated January 10, 1760 and headed “List of Tenants With there Respective Rents as they are Now Raized,” includes John Davids, one of Carel’s sons, who was apparently then holding the farm at Sparta Brook. His rent was six pounds, four shillings and sixpence—about equivalent to forty-one days’ wages for a farm laborer, then running three shillings a day.<sup>13</sup> Also on the list was Jeremiah Stivers, who was the occupant of the former Van Dyck farm during the Revolutionary War and who may have been born there. His father had come to the manor from Eastchester about 1742.<sup>14</sup> A rather poorer farm than most others is indicated by his low rent: two pounds, twelve shillings, sixpence.

## HOMES AND FARMS

We have no direct evidence of the Davids' and Stivers' farming activities at this period, but sufficient documentation is available on other riverfront farms on Philipsburg to give us some picture. The earliest description of a Philipsburg farm refers to one in the present Village of Tarrytown, and appeared in *The New-York Gazette* on 16 May 1757:

TO BE SOLD, All the Improvements on a Farm of near 200 Acres, lying in Philipsborough; consisting of a good large Dwelling-House, having three Rooms on a Floor; has a large Kitchen, a good Celler, with a Store above it, and a commodious large Barn; besides an Orchard of about 200 Apple, Pear, and Peach Trees, and a large Meadow. For Particulars, enquire of John Martlings, on the Premises.<sup>15</sup>

Three decades later, several former Sing Sing residents, former neighbors of the Davids and Stivers families, testified to the Commission of Enquiry into the Losses and Services of the American Loyalists, enumerating the losses caused by their loyalty to the king.

Probably the most similar of the farms described was that of John Bulyea, lying on the river north of the intersection of North Highland and Cedar Lane. The land was "almost all clear;" there was a house, cider mill, fishing dock, and "an extraordinary fine Fishery." Bulyea owned a fishing seine and boat; his farm encompassed "a smart Orchard, and considerable Salt and Fresh Meadow." He described his lost crops as wheat, corn, and buckwheat; and lost livestock consisted of five horses, eight cows, a yoke of oxen, forty sheep, ten hogs, and poultry.<sup>16</sup>

Gilbert Purdy, who had lived along the Croton in the northwest corner of the town, had lost fewer animals: two horses, nineteen hogs, four cows, and sixteen sheep. His crops lost during the war included wheat, rye, Indian corn, buckwheat, and oats, as well as English hay.<sup>17</sup>

For a contemporary record of farm life, however, we must look to New Rochelle and the ledger of James Pitcher, a wealthy Englishman farming there from 1766 to 1776. Over the decade, he recorded the planting of barley, oats, rye, clover, corn, Indian corn, wheat, and Guinea wheat. Vegetables mentioned are peas, carrots, beets, parsnips, onions, potatoes, corn, endive, turnips, celery, and spinach. Flax was planted for fiber, seed, and oil; it is known to have been an important export crop in the Hudson Valley.<sup>18</sup>

## FARM TO MARKET

Exports were important on Philipsburg from the time of settlement. The favored location, adjacent to the Hudson and near the port of New York, made trade

viable for the Philipsburg farmers, who were never "subsistence" oriented. In the late eighteenth century, evidence still points to extensive commercial farming. The Commission of Enquiry heard, with respect to the Joseph Orser farm on Stormytown Road, that "The Land was valuable, being near the North [Hudson] River."<sup>19</sup> Testifying on another case, the Philipse kinsman Beverly Robinson said of the manor, "He always understood the eastern part to have been the most valuable in point of soil, but the other side next to the river was more convenient for water carriage to New York."<sup>20</sup> And writing in 1848 the historian Bolton said, "At an early period, Sing Sing appears to have been a favorite landing place for shipping the various marketable produce raised in the interior."<sup>21</sup>

The market was greatest for grains, beef, and flax, and it is likely that the Davids and Stivers families raised those products. Inasmuch as they adjoined one of the better fishing places along the river, they probably fished as well.

By the decade preceding the Revolution, the sloop traffic at Sing Sing—now Ossining—must have been significant. Thomas Moore, a luckless gentleman merchant of New York City, judged it would be profitable to open a store there in 1770. His son told its sad but comic story in his 1822 memoir:

. . . anxious as he ever was to attempt something more for his family's advantage he once more, though still residing at New York, engaged in a store at Sing Sing, in Westchester County. His character being fair and well established as a man of piety and strict integrity, he had no difficulty in obtaining the necessary small supplies of goods to vend in the country. The person to whom the management of the business was committed was a son of a worthy Presbyterian minister at Crompond, of the name of Sacket. He was recommended as both capable and honest, but he soon proved both incapable and dishonest, and squandered, and at length absconded with the greater part of the property; in fact, his name was a truly characteristic one, for he made sack and plunder of the whole. . . . The store was on a wharf at the river side. On a dark night in summer, and being prepared at all points and no doubt his pockets well lined, he artfully went and laid at the edge of the wharf all the clothes he had worn that day, not omitting even hat and shoes. On the next morning his clothes being found on the dock, but he missing, there were great lamentations that poor Sacket had gone in the Hudson to bathe, and that no doubt he was drowned. The wretch was heard of sometime after in some distant part of the world. . . .<sup>22</sup>

How accurate Moore's account is we may never know, but it is corroborated by a 1773 warrant to attach the property of Samuel Sackett, Jr., late of Philipsburgh, Merchant, "who absconded."<sup>23</sup>

By the seventeen sixties, too, the first institution of record in the vicinity of what was to become Sparta was established. For generations the only church in Philipsburg had been the Old Dutch Church of Sleepy Hollow. On

June 28, 1763 a meeting of the Dutchess County Presbytery received a petition signed by a number of residents of Sing Sing requesting regular preaching.<sup>24</sup> This resulted in the birth of the church, built soon thereafter at the present Sparta Burying Ground. The first burial there was five-year-old Sarah Ledew in 1764.<sup>25</sup>

Another new development in the Sparta vicinity was the discovery about 1759 of silver in the area, which was mined up to the time of the Revolution. The history of the mine, which operated intermittently for a century, is traced in detail in Frederick C. Haacker's article, "Sing Sing Silver Mine," in *The Westchester Historian*, volume 31 (1955).

The gathering storm of the Revolution was to close the mine and end the manor system. The decision of Frederick Philipse III to support the King was largely responsible for the change, but it was not made lightly.

## THE REVOLUTION

Philipse, unlike his antecedents, concentrated on private banking activities and on his land ownership, living elegantly at the Yonkers Manor Hall. A prominent New Yorker, he was associated with the beginnings of anti-administration sentiment in the colony. He was appointed in January of 1774 to the New York Committee of Correspondence and voted with the majority to adopt a declaration of grievances a year later. In May 1775 he prepared an address to General Gage hoping for a reconciliation. But in 1776 he refused to sign the Oath of Allegiance to the Revolutionary cause, and that spring he gathered the inhabitants of Westchester to rally support for the Crown. His tenants neither opposed him automatically—they seem to have had an amicable relationship with him—nor supported his decision unanimously.<sup>26</sup> Many families were, indeed, divided. A petition of January 29, 1779 signed by 163 manor tenants gives their perception of Philipse's decision:

... your petitioners since the commencement of the present contest have exerted ourselves to the utmost of our abilities, and by our indefatigable efforts in the cause in which we are engaged have hitherto kept possession of the ground, although the difficulties we have had to surmount are perhaps without a parallel . . . our landlord in the first of these troubles, espoused our cause, but soon after sent up a writing purporting a protest against Congresses and Committees, by which he enjoined us, the inhabitants to sign, or we should labor under his displeasure; but disregarding his threats, the inhabitants had a meeting, and concluded not to sign the paper; and not long after we were all summoned to meet Mr. Philipse at the White Plains, expecting by his presence to awe his tenants into compliance, but to his mortification found we had virtue enough, (a few only excepted), to refuse him, being

not only then determined to risk all our properties in the glorious cause of Liberty, and are still fixed in our resolutions to persevere to the end of the contest.<sup>27</sup>

While the story of the Revolution is often told through its battles and its congresses, the period must have had a more personal impact on the Davids and Stivers families. Jeremiah Stivers served in the First Regiment, Westchester County Militia,<sup>28</sup> which was essentially a home guard and not part of the standing army. Peter Davids, who had by this time succeeded his father and brother on the farm, is not on record in any military unit. But as the war progressed, the inhabitants of Sing Sing found themselves between the lines of the two armies and they were subjected to attacks from all sides. Again, the petitioners from the Manor speak:

. . . we have been and still are greatly exposed to the ravages of the enemy, and that during the contest they have been up among us as far as Tarry Town four different times with considerable armies, and that the losses sustained and the distress occasioned thereby to the unfortunate families where they came is not to be conceived.

That many of us have repeatedly lost all of our stock and been plundered of wearing apparel, beds, beef, pork; and such furniture as they could not carry off has been wantonly stove to pieces.

That we have several instances of the enemy burning our houses, barns, etc., the unhappy sufferers being turned out of doors in inclement seasons of the year, thus reducing from comfortable living to that of indigence and distress.

That those inhabitants who have escaped the ravages of the enemy's armies have suffered by the Tories, and that not a single instance occurs to us of an avowed friend to our cause, but what has been greatly affected. That several of our friends have been carried off out of their beds and hurried to the Provost [a jail] at New York, and that a number of us dare not sleep in our own houses, but are obliged to seek shelter where we consider ourselves more safe.<sup>29</sup>

A similar viewpoint from the Loyalist side appeared in the same summer in New York's Loyalist newspaper:

NEW-YORK, June 12. We hear from Sing-Sing on Croton River, that on Thursday last nine rebels, amongst whom were John Oakley, Isaac Oakley, and John, son of William Fisher, went to the house of Elbert Artse, seized the man and severely whipped him, tied him to the stump of a tree, and then for their diversion fired small shot at him, till he became a miserable spectacle. They also apprehended one Isaac Artse, tied him up, and whipped him inhumanly, then made him run from

them, when they fired at him with ball, which wounded him in the leg; afterwards they proceeded to Arthur Jones's, seized on his wife, and whipped her in a manner *shocking to relate*. The reason assigned for these cruelties were their refusing to appear when called upon to take up arms against the King's troops, with the Militia.<sup>30</sup>

As far as actual conflict at Sparta, we have documentation for only one insignificant incident, as told by Benjamin Acker to Dr. John MacDonald in 1847:

Once in, I think, the month of October—but in what year I don't remember, I was engaged in watching a British frigate which lay off Sparta, in company with John Paulding, John Requa, David Martling, and Isaac Lent. We lay in ambush in the bushes above Judge Kemey's place. Presently a boat from the frigate approached us with nine men and a woman on board. Not wishing to hurt the woman we let them land, then rose and fired upon them. They made fight and would not surrender till we had fired twice. We killed two, wounded two, made prisoners of the other five, and let the woman go.<sup>31</sup>

The river played an important role in the war, and the farmers along the banks saw plenty of rivercraft on both sides. The British recognized the strategic value of the river to divide the Americans; they also used it to approach American camps and supply depots, those near Peekskill as an example, and it provided access to the rich valley for forage.

The words of contemporary observers speak vividly of the conditions under which the farmers lived. Two selections follow, the first from the military journal of James Thacher, and the second from the travels of Timothy Dwight:

The country which we lately traversed, about fifty miles in extent, is called neutral ground; but the miserable inhabitants who remain, are not much favored with the privileges which their neutrality ought to secure to them. They are continually exposed to the ravages and insults of infamous banditti, composed of royal refugees and tories. The country is rich and fertile, and the farms appear to have been advantageously cultivated, but it now has the marks of a country in ruins. A large proportion of the proprietors having abandoned their farms, the few that remain, find it impossible to harvest the produce. The meadows and pastures are covered with grass of a summer's growth, and thousands of bushels of apples and other fruit, are rotting in the orchards. We brought off about two hundred loads of hay and grain, and ten times the amount might have been procured, had teams enough been provided.<sup>32</sup>

The people of Westchester feared everybody whom they saw and loved nobody. It was a curious fact to a philosopher and a melancholy one to hear their conversation. To every enquirer they gave such an answer as would please him or, if they despaired of pleasing, such a one as would not provoke him. Fear apparently was the only passion by which they were animated. Their homes were in great measure scenes of desolation. The furniture was extensively plundered or broken to pieces. The walls, floors and windows were injured by violence or decay, and they were not repaired because they had no means to repair them, and because they were exposed to the repetition of the same injuries. Their cattle were gone, their enclosures were burnt when they were capable of becoming fuel, and in many cases thrown down when they were not. Their fields were covered with a rank growth of weeds and wild grass.<sup>33</sup>

## A NEW NATION

Frederick Philipse broke a parole placed upon him by the Revolutionary government by going behind the British lines in 1779. In that year the assembly of the new state passed the Sequestration Act<sup>34</sup> conceived as a punitive measure against the landholders loyal to the British Crown.<sup>35</sup> Angered by conditions in New York City when they reoccupied it, the patriots further passed the Confiscation Act of May 1784.<sup>36</sup>

Under these laws, the estates of loyalists were confiscated by the state, and patriot tenants were permitted to become owners of their farms through preemption and purchase before the farms were offered at auction. But they could preempt only if they were able to submit twelve testimonials as to their support of the American cause, and only if they had not subleased their farm from a Loyalist tenant since 1780—this to prevent transfers back to Loyalists. Later the testimonial requirement was modified, and a tenant who could not prove his loyalty might still buy his farm if he could pay the purchase price entirely in gold or silver.

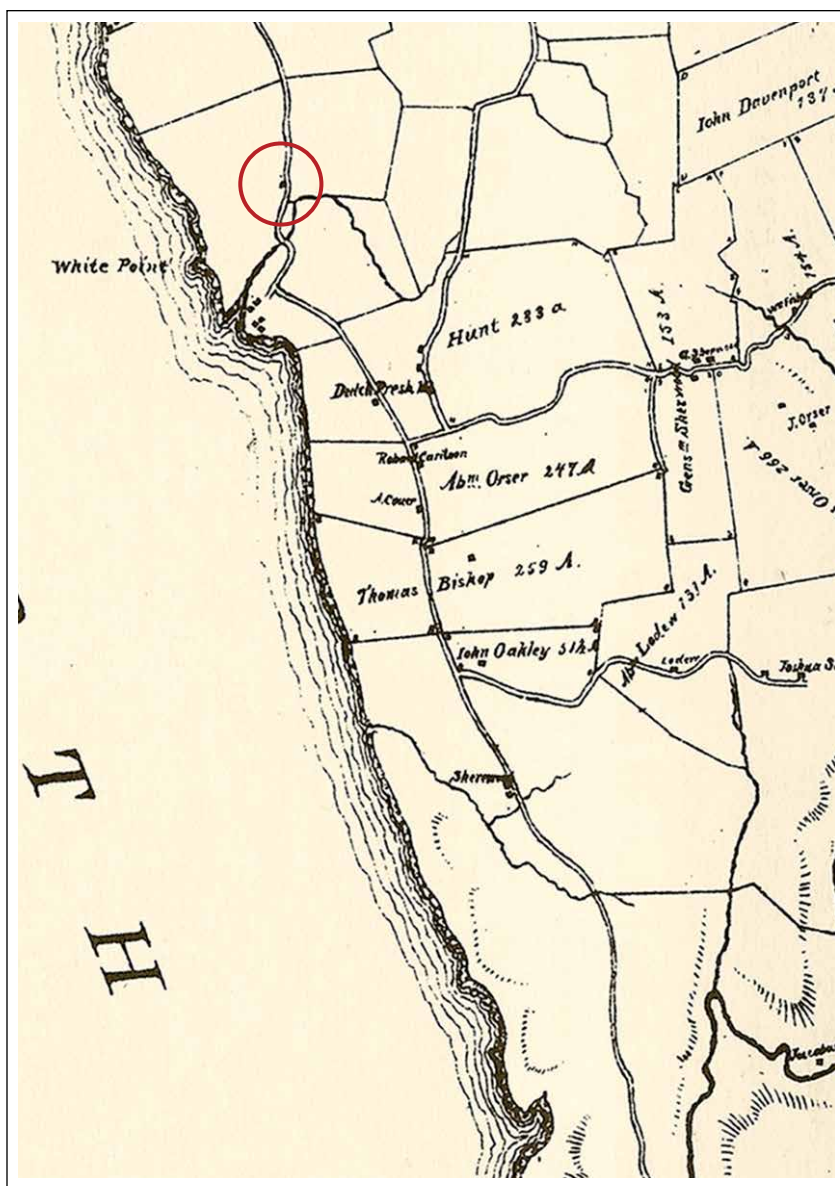
Generally the purchasers paid one-third down and the rest within nine months. Improvements on the land were sold to the new owners by the tenants who had built or owned them. Lands not preempted were sold at public auction.<sup>37</sup>

Peter Davis appears on the final rent roll of the Philipses<sup>38</sup> as well as on a list made by Col. Putnam in 1785 of the quantity of forage consumed by the Allied Army during the last campaign: Davis gave up twenty tons of hay and twenty acres of pasture.<sup>39</sup>

FOLLOWING PAGE: The Jug Tavern of Sparta, painted in 1885 by Ludmilla Pilat Welch (1867–1925).







ABOVE: John Hill's map of area, 1785. Circle marks Jug Tavern. *In May 1784, all the lands of Frederick Philipse from Spuyten Duyvil to the Croton River were confiscated, and John Hill surveyed them prior to their sale to those tenants who had been loyal to the American cause. The Sparta map shows 11 homes between Kemey's Cove and the Sparta brook, but inland from White Point, as Sparta Dock was then called, is the Jug Tavern where the Albany Post Road crossed the Sparta Brook.*

He had married in 1758 and it is presumed lived from about that time in the house known popularly in recent years as the "Jug Tavern" at the northwest intersection of what are now named Revolutionary Road (the old Albany Post Road) and Rockledge Avenue. On December 6, 1785 Peter purchased his two hundred acre farm from the Commissioners of Forfeitures.<sup>40</sup> The price was six hundred pounds.

Despite Jeremiah Stivers' apparent patriot activities, he did not purchase his leasehold. It was sold, instead, to Samuel Drake, "Esquire," who had also served in the militia.<sup>41</sup>

Whatever the impact of the transfer of Philipsburg Manor from a single landlord to 287 individual owners—and historians hold divergent opinions—it is clear that private ownership and favorable conditions for trade in the new nation made possible a much wider economic base for the Sing Sing region.

At the time the sales were being held in 1785, John Hill made a detailed survey of the manor. The original is lost, but on a copy engraved for Scharf's *History of Westchester* (1886) we may discern a small settlement at the mouth of Sing Sing Kill (six houses are shown) as well as five buildings on the point of land between Sparta Brook and Kemey's Cove. On the Sparta riverfront, only "White Point," later enlarged into Sparta Dock, appears, and there is no reason to believe there was anything on the land north of the brook save the Davis farm buildings.<sup>42</sup>

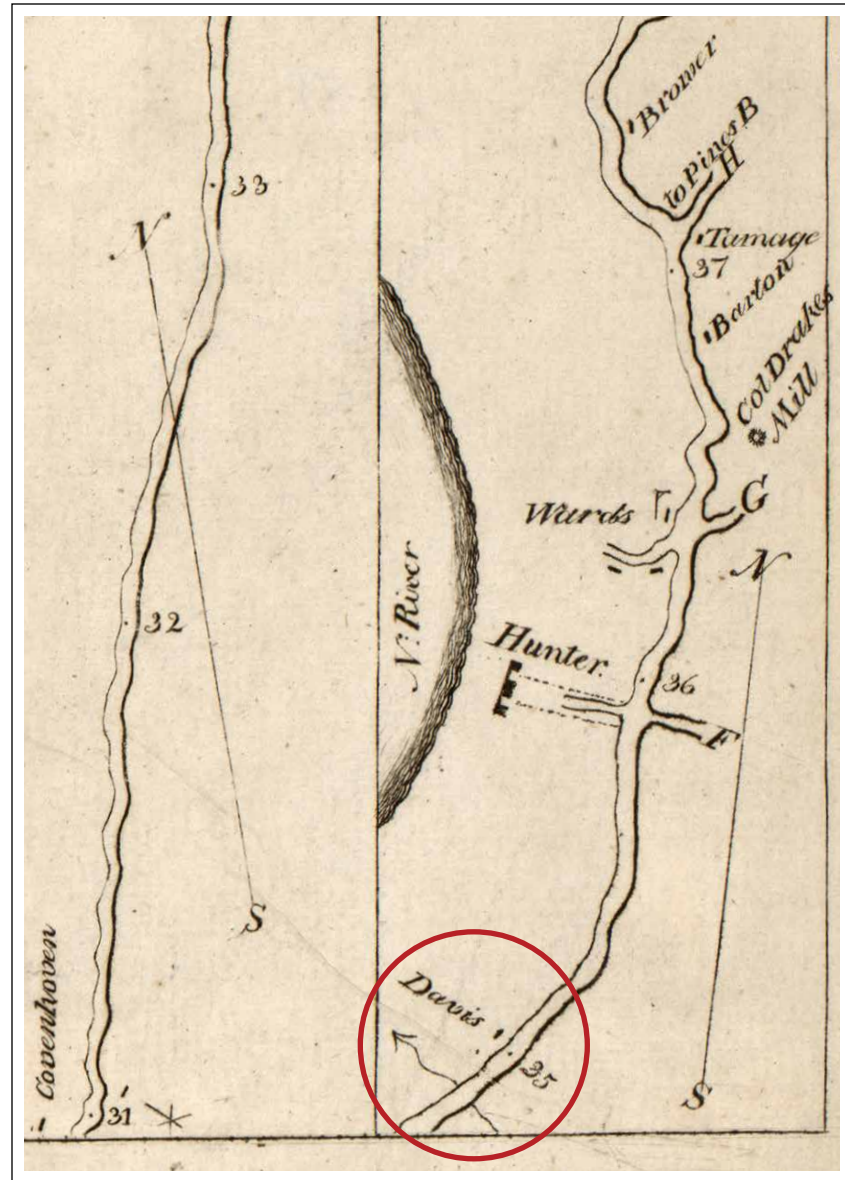
Dr. George Jackson Fisher, writing for Scharf's history, gave his perception of the beginnings of settlement south of Sparta Brook:

In the earliest times farmers brought their produce for shipment to a dock which stood in the cove a short distance north of Scarborough station. The road which came down to the dock ran past a storehouse not far from the water's edge. A short distance north of the dock, near the mouth of Sparta Brook, on the southern bank of the stream, was a grist-mill, which was run by the water-power furnished by the brook. . .<sup>43</sup>

This statement, though not contemporary, locates a hamlet on the south side of the mouth of Sparta Brook in the "earliest times." Since Philipse permitted no mills on the manor other than his own, such a grist mill must post-date 1779, and the dock and other structures are probably also of that period.

On April 22, 1789 the road from the Post Road to this landing as shown on Hill's map was "laid out" officially by the Town of Mount Pleasant; the surviving fragment of the record reads "the house of Samuel Drake . . . to run along towards the . . . trees & thence to high Water . . . of the Dock. . ."<sup>44</sup> Four years later a roadmaster was recorded to be in charge of the highway "from Peter Davis to the Landing."<sup>45</sup>

This road also appears, without any details of the landing or settlement, on *A Survey of the Roads of the United States of America*, an atlas published by Christopher Colles in 1789. On the north side of the intersection is shown a tavern marked "Drakes," and on the south side another marked "Lesters."<sup>46</sup>



These taverns were apparently not of long duration, but they do appear in “An Account of the persons who are permitted to keep houses of publick Entertainment in the town of Mount Pleasant,” dated March 9, 1790. Andrew Leister and Samuel Drake are listed.<sup>47</sup> It is not clear why Drake, who bought the land from the Commissioners a few years earlier, had allowed an adjoining site to fall into the hands of competition.

In October of 1794 an intelligent and articulate Englishman, William Strickland, traveled the Post Road during an American tour to learn more about American agriculture. At “a tavern near Mount Pleasant church,” which was probably Drakes, he made the following observations:

We had seen little yet to give us a favourable idea of the comforts of travelling in this country, and the external appearance of the tavern at Mountpleasant added nothing to it; we put up our horses in a shed, much like that at a Blacksmith's shop in a country village, and expected no better appartment for ourselves in which to eat our homely meal which we desired to be prepared while we took a walk to survey the neighbourhood; our surprise however on our return was of a very agreeable nature when we saw in a neat room on a table cloth white as snow preparations made for breakfast which consisted of tea and bread and butter; honey; sweetmeats and marmalades of various kinds, of quinces and wild fruits of the country; beefsteaks; mutton chops; pickles of several sorts; milk and cheesecakes; such a scene gladdened our hearts, we praised American fare and enjoyed a meal so well suited to our stomachs, after a long ride in a frosty morning.<sup>48</sup>

As Strickland traveled through Philipsburg, he had made observations on the scenery and agriculture of a more general nature, which indicate reasons behind the gradual decline of farming in the area:

Much wheat used to be grown in this neighborhood, but the Hessian fly has stopped the cultivation; no wheat can resist its attack, except the white bearded wheat, which is of inferior quality; in the place of it they sow rye and plant corn. The insect attacks the root and stalk in the spring when the plant is about two feet high, and sometimes at a later period; after which the plant dies. . . . From Philipsburgh [Yonkers] to

OPPOSITE PAGE: Section from Christopher Colles map of Albany Post Road. In 1789 Christopher Colles published “A Survey of Roads of the United States of America,” including the route of the Albany Post Road from Poughkeepsie to New York City. At the bottom of the section, the building marked Davis (opposite the figure 35) shows the site of the Jug Tavern.

a tavern near Mount Pleasant church where we breakfasted, the road leads through a country hardly to be surpassed in beauty by any in the world. On our left the river, here called the Tapaan Sea, and not less than four miles in breadth, is generally in sight . . . . On our right hand, is in general a cultivated country, swelling into gentle and various inequalities, the knolls covered with wood, with various patches of copse and wood scattered over the country, and the whole gradually sloping down to the edge of the water. The country strikingly resembles the best parts of Hertfordshire, and would be still more like it, were the fields only divided by well planted hedges instead of the vile railing which every where so greatly disfigures it, and here wood being still plentiful the railing is of the worst description, what they call worm fencing, which is not easy to describe either by words or the pencil. . . The man who keeps the tavern, has a farm of about 250 acres for which he pays three dollars a year for every manner of tax, State, continental, or parochial. He gives a man 5/ pr: day for mowing Buckwheat, and a Bush: of wheat a day, or the value of a Bush. during Harvest. Twenty Bush: of wheat pr: acre is accounted a good crop—30 to 40 of Mays. The course of crops is Buckwheat.—Mays.—Rye or wheat.—flax as long as the land will bear any thing, after which when totally exhausted, it is left to nature to recruit; but *the people begin to find out*, that it is more advantageous to sow the land with clover, than leave it to nature; and some has of late been sown.<sup>49</sup>

Nowhere does Strickland mention, late in 1794, a settlement of Englishmen near his journey through Philipsburg, although he was an Englishman himself of considerable inquisitiveness. If, as it appears, he visited the area before the development of Sparta, it was only a few months at most before the community was begun.

## THE BIRTH OF A COMMUNITY

The origin of the hamlet goes back to the actions of Peter Davis. On November 16, 1772, Davis had acknowledged indebtedness of £200 to Charles Williams Esq. of New York. Davis was to pay £100 before the 17th of November ensuing. On July 8, 1789, he acknowledged his indebtedness to Sarah E. Williams of New York to the sum of £100, under the condition that he pay £50 within a year's time. On the same day Peter and Martha Davis mortgaged seventy acres of his farm, the part west of the Post Road, to Abraham Walton, executor of Charles Williams' estate. The mortgage was to be void upon the payment of £150 with interest from the date of the two obligations as above.<sup>50</sup>

Far too little survives about Peter Davis to speculate as to why he failed to redeem his land. On February 21, 1794 Walton endorsed the mortgage over to James Drowley. Then, on September 16, 1795, Drowley died, and his executors—Isaac Tilford, William Talbot, and William Allum—assumed control. The heirs of Peter Davis sold William Allum thirty acres, the northerly riverfront section of the Davis farm, in August of 1796.<sup>51</sup> Finally, on October 31 of that year, twenty-six acres of the original tract east of the thirty acre tract and described as bounded on the south by Sparta, were quitclaimed by the three executors to the heirs of the late Peter Davis.<sup>52</sup>

By the time these transactions had been completed, a hamlet had been established on the southerly riverfront section of the farm, which appears from the deeds to have passed to Drowley through the unredeemed mortgage. A copy of the original map of this tract, entitled "SPARTA, A Town building on the East side of Hudson's River 35 Miles North of N. York," was surveyed by J. Harmer in November of 1795, shortly after Drowley's death, and shows a small village plat consisting of three north-south streets—Anna, Olive, and Mary—and two east-west streets—Liberty and William.<sup>53</sup>

Traditionally, Sparta is thought to have been settled by Englishmen. Scharf is the earliest printed statement of this belief: "James Drowley, an English merchant of New York and an importer of dry-goods . . . brought over in his vessels from County Kent, England, a number of his former neighbors, with whom he began the settlement of his village."<sup>54</sup> We study Sparta's history under the difficulties imposed by a lack of immigration records and the infrequency with which deeds were recorded, but through a combination of many sources, the motives and movements under which Sparta was settled become understandable.

A single issue of the New York *Evening Post*, that of December 1, 1794, carried advertisements by three men who affected Sparta's development. We read:

Hardware, &c.&c. JAMES DROWLEY, Takes this method to inform the public, that he has taken the stock and store of the late Mr. Wm. Rose, No. 4, Cherry-street, consisting of a large quantity of Iron mongery and Hardware. . . .

TALBOT, ALLUM & LEE, No. 241 Pearl-Street. Have received by the late Vessels from London, a large and elegant assortment of Bombazeens, coloured Crapes. . . .

J. HARMER, PAINTER, GLAZIER, AND GILDER, FROM LONDON . . . No. 4 Peck-slip. . . .<sup>55</sup>

All three of the men were probably recent immigrants from England;



certainly Harmer was, and none of the three appears in New York during the First Federal Census made four years earlier.<sup>56</sup>

The two merchants, Drowley and Allum, joined a number of others at some point in 1794 or 1795 in a society whose purposes indicate some connection with Drowley's and Allum's Sparta project. In Duncan's city directory of 1795 the following information is given for "The New-York Society for the Information and Assistance of Persons emigrating from foreign Countries":

From reviewing the great inconveniences that frequently attend emigration, and the variety of causes to which they may be attributed, a number of the Citizens of New-York have formed themselves into a Society, for the beneficent purposes of preventing or lessening those disagreeable consequences.

It is certainly a fact, that emigrants from one country to another are liable to numberless unforeseen disappointments—it is equally true, that change of diet, and confinement on board the vessels, together with difference of climate, often produce diseases, which sometimes prove fatal; nor will it be denied, that in some instances, a little friendly interference might rescue persons from being the victims of misfortune.

To those in affluent circumstances, the Society can only offer their individual friendship, congratulate them on their safe arrival, and wish them success and happiness.

Those in middling circumstances, who may wish for information, the society refer to their committee, who will always be ready to shew them any friendly office in their power.

But to the unfortunate, the sick, the friendless and the needy, the society address themselves in a peculiar manner. They request them not to suffer their spirits to droop; and assure them that upon application to either of the committee, their cases will be taken into immediate consideration.

Should any indigent persons be so unfortunate as to arrive in a state of sickness, the society have the happiness to inform them, that their Physician will always be ready to give them every necessary attendance, free of expence. Those who may wish for immediate employ, have an opportunity of applying to the Register of the Society, who keeps a regular entry of all applications for employ, as well as an account of applications for artificers, labourers, &c.<sup>57</sup>

In the first list of "Names of the Committee," dated June 30, 1794,

PREVIOUS PAGES: Sparta subdivision plan, 1795. *The map of the proposed Sparta development by J. Harmer lent substance to James Drowley's dream of a subdivision, certainly one of America's first. All the streets were laid out straight, but it obviously became expedient later to route Liberty Street around the stone bluff behind the Jug Tavern (top of map), and thus Rockledge Avenue was born. The two blocks of Liberty Street, leading up from the river remain as planned. Olive Street became Spring, and Anne became Hudson.*

neither Drowley nor Allum appears, but in 1795 Allum was serving as Treasurer and Drowley as Register.<sup>58</sup>

Whether Drowley became involved in the society as a result of his real estate interests at Sparta, or whether Sparta was launched as a haven for the immigrants the Society intended to assist, is not clear. The earliest reference to Sparta occurs in the Mount Pleasant Town Records under date of April 30, 1795 when "William Hall of the City of Sparta Hath Taken a License from the 19th of October to the first Tuesday in March. . . ."<sup>59</sup> Drowley had acquired the land in February 1794, but was not on the committee in June 1794. No one except the Davis family is known to have lived at "Sparta" until Hall appears in the record, and the survey of lots was not drawn until November 1795, two months after Drowley's death in September. Whenever the idea developed in Drowley's mind, it must have been pursued with considerable speed.

Richard Hillier, a physician, had settled at Sparta and was acting as Drowley's attorney on June 6, 1795 when he sold two lots to Thomas Agate.<sup>60</sup> Allum himself bought a lot from Hillier in October 1796,<sup>61</sup> and was living in Sparta in February 1798.<sup>62</sup> Hillier sold a lot to Edward Priestley in November 1799,<sup>63</sup> and his heirs living in Ohio sold White Point [Sparta Dock] and land adjacent to it, amounting to two acres, to Thomas Agate in 1838.<sup>64</sup>

In February 1798, Allum conveyed the fourteen acres, the western part of the north tract of thirty acres, to John James DeRose of Sparta, who shortly afterward sold it.<sup>65</sup> At about this time Allum or Hillier drew up plans for an addition to Sparta, located on the sixteen acres between DeRose and the Davis heirs. By September 1798 Hillier was selling lots there.<sup>66</sup> On April 18, 1804 Richard Hillier and Anna, his wife, then living in New York City, sold to Samuel Stansburg, merchant, as trustee for Maria Bowering—whose husband Caleb Bryant Bowering, a New York merchant, paid for it—all his remaining interest in this newer part of Sparta.

This deed excepted Hambden Street, fifty feet wide; Fountain Street, also fifty feet; Brew House Lane, forty feet; and Fountain Alley, twenty feet. Only Hambden (otherwise Hampden or Hampton) Street ever existed, and today is Spring Street as it ascends the hill. Fountain Street was 240 feet west of Hampden Street. The location of the other streets is unknown. Also excluded from the deed were all the lots Hillier had sold in the tract; sixteen lot owners were named.<sup>67</sup>

No comprehensive material has been assembled on the settlers of Sparta, but they do appear to be largely English. James Cheetham, a New York City hatter who bought seven lots in the newer section in 1798,<sup>68</sup> had come from England for political reasons in 1794 or early 1795. In the New York *Evening Post* of February 16, 1795, we read:

Just received front Philadelphia, and for sale by JAMES CHEETHAM, Hatter, 25, Broadstreet, . . . The Trials of Thomas Walker, of Manchester, and . . . James Cheetham . . . for a conspiracy to overthrow the constitution and to assist the French (being the kings enemies) at the assizes at Lancaster, 2d April 1794.<sup>69</sup>



ABOVE: Sparta in 1820. Sparta Dock at the foot of Liberty Street was then doing a thriving business, as much as Sing-Sing dock, two miles north. But even then it was doomed, because the turnpike roads all favored Sing-Sing. The Hudson Turnpike Co. was organized in 1806, and a few years later when the Turnpike was built along the route of present U.S. 9, Revolutionary Road, as this section of the old Albany Post Road is now known, and all Sparta were orphaned.

The Agate family were English born and consisted originally of three brothers and two sisters. Of the brothers, William went to the “Genesee” or Pittsford, New York and John may also have done so; one sister, Mary, married Edward Priestley and remained in Sparta, as did her brother Thomas.<sup>70</sup> Many other early settlers of Sparta moved on to Pittsford and other towns in the Genesee.

Josiah Rhodes, called on his gravestone in Sparta cemetery a “minister of the gospel in England,” was living at Sculcoates, Yorkshire, when he made his will in August 1805. He called himself a merchant, was involved in business ventures at Sparta, and had returned there when he died on January 4, 1807.<sup>71</sup>

William Kemeys, who owned Sparta lots as well as a tract at Kemeys’s Cove, was from Scarborough, Yorkshire, according to Bolton.<sup>72</sup> John Boorman, who lived near Sparta and died in 1796, was a native of Kent.<sup>73</sup>

Another Sparta lot holder who moved on to the Genesee was Thomas Billinghamurst, who went to Northfield in Ontario County. The brothers and sisters of Edward Priestley of Sparta, who were all of Pittsford and Brighton when he died in 1849,<sup>74</sup> may also have sojourned in Sparta.

The homes built by the settlers are, in some cases, still standing. Their belongings are long since removed, but from the inventory of Josiah Rhodes’ estate in 1808, we can learn the contents of the home of that well-to-do Sparta merchant:

- 1 Cot feather Bed Bolster Pillows 3 Blankets & Counterpane
- 1 Chest of Drawers—1 Looking Glass— & 1 Chair
- 1 Camp Bedstead with Dimity furniture—Mattrass feather Bed  
Bolster—Pillows—3 Blankets & Cotton Counterpane
- Window Curtains—Glass—D.ble Chest of Drawers—Night Table—Chair  
Wash hand stand—Pitcher Bason & Carpets
- 1 Camp Bedstead Check furniture—feather Bed Bolster—Pillows—three  
Blankets and One Quilt
- Window Curtains—three Chairs—Looking Glass—Bottle Bason and Carpets
- 1 Cot—feather Bed—Bolster Pillows—3 Blankets & 1 Quilt
- Window Curtains—Chest of Drawers—Looking Glass and Stair Carpets
- 1 Dining Table—I Card Table-1 Stand—6 Chairs

Window Curtains—Tea Urn—One Large & 2 Small Pictures  
 fender & fire Irons—2 Shells—Carpet  
 Sopha—6 Chairs—Pembroke Table—Pier Glass  
 Derbyshire Urns—Hand Irons—Carpet—Book Case & Desk  
 Window Curtains—18 China Cups Saucers—2 Tea Pots  
 2 Slop Basons—2 Sugar Boxes & three Caske Plates— 2 Milk Jugs  
 4 Decanters & 2 Stands—2 Pitchers—17 Wine Glasses & 6 Tumblers  
 7 Silver Tea Spoons—4 Table Spoons—Sugar Tongs—Watch  
 2 Tables—4 Chairs—Ironing Board and 1 Winter hedge  
 4 Smoothing Irons—2 footmen—1 Chafing Dish & 1 Dutch Oven  
 2 Bread Trays—1 Butlers Tray—2 Tea Trays and 3 Waiters  
 3 Iron Pots—2 Brass Pans—1 Sauce Pan—2 Tea Kettles & 1 Warming Pan  
 1 Bed Pan—1 Cullender—2 Graters—1 Drudging Pot & 2 Pepper boxes  
 6 Candlesticks & 2 paid of Sniffers and Stands  
 1 Small Tin Oven—1 Frying pan and 1 pair of Silyards  
 Tongs Shovel fender Cleaver Carving Skife & 10 Knives 7 forks  
 6 Oval Dishes sundry small Dishes—6 Baking dishes & 10 Jars  
 2 Pails—4 Milk Pans—Coal Pan & 4 metal Spoons  
 3 Cider Barrels—5 Gallon Kegs—3 Stone Jugs & 3 doz Glass Bottles  
 1 Iron Pot and 3 Wash Tubs  
 1 Cart—and 1 Chair  
 Saw Ax Shovel rake—2 Garden Hoes—Watering pan & Dung fork  
 2 Side Saddles and 1 Mans Saddle  
 9 Pair of Sheets—12 Pair of Pillow Cases—4 Bolster Pillow Cases—6 Table  
 Cloths and 11 Towels  
 293 Volumes of Books on Different Subjects  
 23¼ yds of Cloth  
 1 Lot of Flannel  
 1 Lot of Yard <sup>75</sup>

However uncommon the contents of Rhodes' inventory may be, they do demonstrate the presence in the community of at least some persons of means.

## AN INDUSTRIAL VILLAGE

It seems as though many Sparta settlers were involved in one of a number of industrial enterprises as laborers. Josiah Rhodes was instrumental in one of these; in partnership with William Kemeys, he operated a mustard manufactory on Sparta Brook. This mustard mill appears on William Adams' 1797 map of Mount Pleasant, along with the somewhat older grist mill<sup>76</sup> which was then owned by William Arnold. Arnold sold it to William Byron in August of the following year.<sup>77</sup>

In Rhodes' will he cites his share in three wooden buildings "now

employed as A mannifactory for the flour of Mustard and for crushing flax-seed & for any other purpose. . . ." <sup>78</sup> The inventory of Rhodes' estate lists the company's stock, including mustard, seed, bran, bottles, and other containers.<sup>79</sup> On August 10, 1802 Rhodes and Kemeys purchased from Hillier all of Mount Murray, the rugged knoll between the Sparta lots and their mustard mill.<sup>80</sup>

The mustard mill was still operating in 1819 when the *Westchester Herald* carried an advertisement: "A QUANTITY OF MUSTARD BRAN, Good for Manure, to be sold at the Manufactory in Sparta—enquire of WILLIAM STEERS."<sup>81</sup> At the same time Kemeys was offering the manufactory for sale or to let.<sup>82</sup> An advertisement was inserted in the *Westchester Herald* in the following year by the new proprietors:

MUSTARD. COOKE & COOPER, have commenced the Manufacturing of Mustard, at Sparta, where they offer to their friends and the public in general, MUSTARD of a very superior quality, on the most reasonable terms. The highest price will be given for SEED at the Stores of D. Carpenter, Sing-Sing, R. Carpenter, Sparta, and at 31 Nassau Street, New York. June 6, 1820.<sup>83</sup>

In 1824 Kemeys, as Master in Chancery, advertised the auction sale of Josiah Rhodes' estate, including half the mustard mill "so-called."<sup>84</sup> Whether it was still operating at that time, and whether it ever again operated, is not known.

Another early manufactory was the brickyard and kiln, about which we know little. In the order of the Chancery Court to sell the Rhodes estate is included "one undivided share in the Brick-yard and Dock at the Sparta Landing, the said share being a certain interest in the said premises pursuant to the articles of agreement of the association to which the said Brick-yard and Dock originally belonged."<sup>85</sup> A few years later the Hillier heirs sold the lots near the dock "together with brick kiln, hack houses, warehouses and water courses. . . ."<sup>86</sup> Several buildings in Sparta were built of brick, and one of these was Josiah Rhodes' home, now 1 Rockledge Avenue.<sup>87</sup> But brick making was not apparently a long-lived industry in Sparta.

The land beneath Sparta was the source of another industry which

FOLLOWING PAGES: Sparta Mustard Mill, *painted* by Mary Ann Whittingham, 1870. *The Sparta mustard seed mill was owned by Josiah Rhodes and William Kemeys and consisted of three buildings on the Sparta Brook.*





lasted until recent times. The beds of marble and limestone north of Sparta seem to have been worked before 1820 when the *Westchester Herald* asked the question:

Have the Commission, advising the selling of the present State Prison, at New York . . . examined the quarries in the vicinity of this place? Do they know that besides the marble here, occupying a tract of more than 60 acres, we have also in the same place, two Silver Mines, which once have been profitably worked?<sup>88</sup>

The prison was soon established at Sing Sing largely because of the marble beds. On May 14, 1826 Captain Lynds and 100 convicts came from Auburn to Sing Sing to begin the prison, which was completed in 1829.<sup>89</sup>

Whatever private and prison quarrying went on early in the century, the lime manufactory had its start no later than 1839, when the following advertisement appeared:

Lime for Sale. The Subscribers have commenced the business of Burning Lime in the Village of Sparta, and have now on hand a supply of both unslacked barrel or Lump Lime, for building, etc.—and also fine Lime for manure—which they will sell at reasonable prices. Apply to either of the Subscribers.

Daniel Harding, Sparta  
Floyd Foster, Sing-Sing<sup>90</sup>

Dated April 2, 1839

Another industry excited great interest but had little lasting effect on the local economy. This was the copper mine, located in the marble cliff below what is now Hudson Street. It was discovered in or about 1820, and was the object of optimistic speculation by the Westchester Copper Mine Company, incorporated April 12, 1824. Edward Kemeys was president of the company, which maintained a New York office at 126 Broadway. Shares in the endeavor were sold for twenty-five dollars.

It is not clear when mining began, but the first thirty-foot shaft was extended to eighty feet in the fall of 1827, and a horizontal shaft was made at high water level which met the vertical shaft at a distance of four hundred feet into the rock. While the first shaft had yielded several tons of rich ore, part of it assaying three-quarters pure, the additional shafts, which ultimately totalled 530 feet, struck nothing. The company had, however, brought Cornish miners from England under the direction of Joseph Tregaskis. Whether any of these miners remained in the hamlet is not known.

About 1860, Kemeys had the shaft cleared with the intention of resuming the effort, but it was soon abandoned, although its existence was noted on a number of maps up to 1881.<sup>91</sup>

## RIVER TRADE

River traffic was clearly in the minds of Sparta's founders. There was originally a dock association which developed White Point as a landing, although the only references to it are late and sketchy: mention is made of it as a part of Josiah Rhodes' estate, and "one Share of the Sparta Dock Association" was offered for sale at public auction by Edward Priestley, administrator of the estate of John Burgess, in 1826.<sup>92</sup>

Through most of the first half of the nineteenth century, Sparta had its share of the market sloop traffic, in addition to the shipping of mustard, bricks, lime, and other industrial products. A change in the market sloops' landing to the docks at Sing Sing has been said to have caused Sparta to decline. According to Dr. Fisher:

The transportation business was about equally divided between Sparta and Sing Sing near the year 1820, at which time Captain Stephen Orser and Captain John Leggett sailed sloops from Sparta. Through some difference in the rental of docks, Captain Leggett changed his sailing-place to Sing Sing, and this little circumstance turned the tide of business to the latter place. . . . The river-transportation of a half-century ago was vastly more important than it is at present. That was before the days of the railroads. Then the produce of the entire agricultural district extending to the Connecticut State line, including the towns of North and South Salem, Bedford and even portions of Putnam County, a distance of thirty miles, were shipped to New York City from this port, and the supplies of groceries and merchandise received through the same channels.<sup>93</sup>

Whatever the difference in rental may have been, Sparta could scarcely have expected to command the bulk of produce trade. The turnpike routes strongly favored Sing-Sing. The Highland Turnpike Company, which constructed the new Albany Post Road, was incorporated April 2, 1806, with "William Keymiss" as one of the incorporators.<sup>94</sup> When the road was built several years later near Sparta, it ran further east than the old road had. Further, the Croton Turnpike Company, incorporated April 6, 1807, built the road which is now Croton Avenue, from the center of the up-country agricultural district, terminating on the Albany Post Road at a point just uphill from Sing Sing Landing.<sup>95</sup> Farmers from the back country intending to use Sparta Landing instead had an additional mile to travel.

Nonetheless, sloop traffic from Sparta Landing continued for at least several decades. In 1826 Richard Austen of Sing Sing advertised:

FOR SALE the Sloop CORTLANDT of 75 tons burthen; is a good substantial vessel, in good condition, and a part of her timbers are locust. For terms apply to Capt. John Sherwood at Sparta, or to the subscriber. . . .<sup>96</sup>

In 1837 Captain Stephen Orser and John Harris ran the sloop *Boxer* to New York on Thursday afternoon, and the *Robert Emmett* was operated from the same landing by Richard Mattocks and Stephen Pugsley.<sup>97</sup> The *Boxer* was again advertised in 1839:

For the remainder of the season, will leave Sparta Landing every Tuesday afternoon, at 3 o'clock, with what freight may offer for the city of New York; and return on Friday afternoon of each week commencing this day, (17th instant)

All freight and orders entrusted to the Captain will be punctually attended to.

Sparta, Sept. 11, 1839<sup>98</sup>

S. Orsor

Some time after that date, sloop traffic was discontinued.

## COMMERCIAL ESTABLISHMENTS

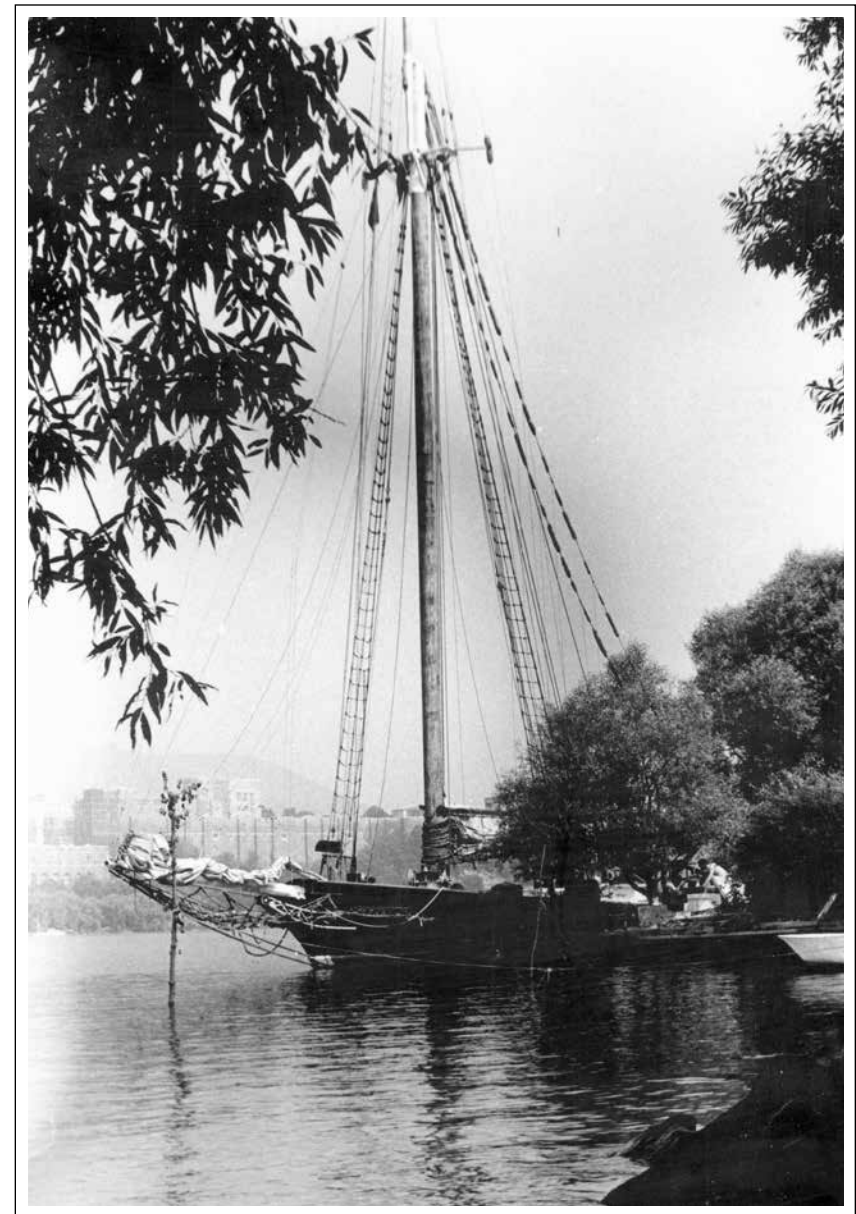
The small village of Sparta supported a handful of commercial establishments in its earlier years. The first reference to Sparta is Hall's tavern license in April 1795. In the same year Thomas Agate began keeping a "House of Entertainment," as taverns were called, and he did so at least intermittently until 1811.<sup>99</sup> At the time Bolton wrote (1848) Sparta still had one tavern.<sup>100</sup>

In April 1819 R. & D. Carpenter advertised the opening of a new store in Sing-Sing, to carry dry goods, groceries, and crockery ware, assuring their customers that they would carry on their store at Sparta.<sup>101</sup> On November 25, 1820, they dissolved their partnership, with Rees Carpenter continuing the Sparta store, and David Carpenter the one at Sing Sing.<sup>102</sup>

Meanwhile, Thomas Agate, the erstwhile tavernkeeper, was operating a store at Sparta. In May 1819 he advertised medicines for sale at his store,<sup>103</sup> and again in January 1823 he offered medicines.<sup>104</sup> At the time of his death on June 17, 1837, he still had the store, and the inventory of his estate includes page after page of stock.<sup>105</sup>

Still another was the Sparta Cash Store, which advertised early in 1840 that as of the first of that year it would sell for cash only.<sup>106</sup>

Peter Underhill Fowler, writing from "near Sparta" on December 2, 1839, advertised that he had erected a blacksmith shop on his premises near the junction of the Highland and Sparta Roads and was "prepared to do all kinds of Blacksmith work in the best manner and on reasonable terms such as shoeing of Horses, Oxen, laying Axes, Tiring wheels, repairing, etc."<sup>107</sup> Peter U. Fowler lived at what is now 60 Revolutionary Road and was the grandfather of Myra (LeFevre) Acker of Ossining.<sup>108</sup>



ABOVE: Sloop at Sparta Dock. *View looking north toward Sing Sing Prison.*

## PUBLISHING AND EDUCATION

Surprisingly, considering the limited scope of the community even in its halcyon days, the early printing and publishing industry in Westchester had associations with Sparta. Westchester's first publisher was William Durrell of Mount-Pleasant, then the name for Ossining, in 1797. Durrell was a lot owner, if not a resident, of Sparta.<sup>109</sup> He was publishing a newspaper called the *Mount Pleasant Register* by May 8, 1797, and he published at least four books there.<sup>110</sup> He also operated a paper manufactory at Mount Pleasant.<sup>111</sup> The unfortunate Durrell was tried in 1800 for reprinting, in his paper of June 19, 1798, a "seditious" communication which had appeared in the *New Windsor Gazette*. The President remitted his fine and imprisonment, but in the year of his trial he moved back to New York City, from whence he had come.<sup>112</sup>

Another early printer at Mount Pleasant, Russell Canfield, published an eleven-page pamphlet of an address delivered by Dr. Hillier on July 4, 1800. Hillier advertised it on July 22, 1800 in Canfield's *Impartial Gazette*:

Just Published and For Sale

By the Author, at Sparta

(Price Ninepence)

A Pamphlet Entitled,

"Liberty and Equality."

An Oration wherein the principles of the Declaration of Independence, are Illustrated and Supported and Some of the causes which may endanger the liberties of America, printed out. . .<sup>113</sup>

Such strong pro-American sentiment seems to have been common among Sparta residents. Earlier in that year a petition "of sundry Inhabitants of Mount Pleasant" came out of committee in the House of Representatives. The petition had requested that they be exempted from the then current naturalization law. In June 1798, when many Sparta and Sing Sing residents had been in America for only three or four years, the law was changed to require fourteen, rather than just five, years in residence. The petition was not, however, approved.<sup>114</sup>

A letter found in an old house in Sparta many years ago reflects a similar attachment to the new nation.<sup>115</sup> Edward Dixon, a young man then living in Mount Pleasant, wrote to his parents in Billerley, Northumberland:

Concerning this Country as I promised to give my best account according to my short trial, I can with conscience declare that it surpasses greatly what I expected when at Billerley. It is a land of peace and conscious liberty, accurately formed for a plentiful living and wonderfully Calculated by Divine bounty to make a plentiful repast for the homely Peasant. Yea, many things daily furnish this Table which are

great strangers in England. In general the poorest class of people live better here and softer here than any Family in Shillington, but for the Farmers they are like the Sons of Kings . . . For all kinds of people rich or poor, this is the better Country.<sup>116</sup>

Dixon, clearly an articulate man, was then a schoolmaster. Elsewhere his letter gives the first evidence of education in the Sing Sing vicinity; four schools were then in operation. Hill's map of 1785 shows a number of schoolhouses in Philipsburg, including one near the present Pace College campus which may have drawn scholars from parts of the Sing Sing district. The State Assembly passed "An Act for the Encouragement of Schools" in 1795, providing funds to be apportioned by supervisors to the towns.<sup>117</sup> Five years afterward, Dixon wrote:

I have got a School here which I began about 7 weeks since. I expect it will keep me well and leave 150 Dollars a year which I think sufficient to keep all my Family. Being a stranger I got but few Scholars a week or two at first; altho there are 3 schools and mine within ¼ of a mile I have most Scholars now. I only teach about 5 hours a day & 5 days for the week is the custom. This gives one time enough to visit my old fellow Country-men (which are pretty thick settled about here) or any other amusement I see proper. But I have got a Library to keep & write for which I count delightful employment. . .<sup>118</sup>

After reading words like Dixon's, one wonders if the English immigrants held no pro-British sympathies in the war of 1812. The single indication found has to do with the organization of the first fire department at Sing Sing on May 4, 1812. Fisher wrote, "It is said the primary motive in this early organization was to make a loophole through which to escape enlistment into the army, then being recruited for service in the War of 1812."<sup>119</sup> Such action may indicate the unpopularity of the second war against England, or it may just indicate an aversion to military service. At any rate, Edward Kemeys, Edward Priestly, Samuel Rhodes, and Thomas Agate of Sparta were among the original members.

Dixon's stay in Sing Sing took place at a time of increasing religious activity. Of worship Dixon wrote:

I hear generally a Presbyterian Minister 3 or 4 miles off. . . . There is often 2 or 3 sermons at this town on Sabbath days (Anabapters clever men) & a methodist preaching once in 2 weeks.<sup>120</sup>

The "Anabapters" were members of the Ossining Baptist Church, begun in 1786.<sup>121</sup> Meanwhile, the Presbyterian Church at Sparta, apparently Dixon's chosen congregation, was experiencing growth, and had been

offered land near Sing Sing village. Between January 18, 1802 and May 12, 1803 a new church was built there; on March 23, 1807 the church trustees recommended that the old meeting house near Sparta be sold, it being “in a state of decay.”<sup>122</sup>

## STEAM AND RAILROAD

By about 1830 great changes in transportation were taking place, and they soon had their impact on Sparta. Steam navigation had begun in 1824, but for the moment wagon and sloop traffic remained dominant. The Highway Register of the Town of Ossining gives us a better picture of the growth of Sparta along or against the lines of the original town layout. When roads were entered in the town records, they had generally been in common use for many years.

In April 1836 and February 1837 Hampden Street and Olive Street were accepted as town roads to connect with Spring Street, running south from the Village of Ossining.<sup>123</sup> Anna Street, now Hudson Street, was also recorded in January 1837, as was an unnamed road, consisting of what is now Rockledge Avenue and Liberty Street to the dock.<sup>124</sup> Hudson Street was extended to the prison grounds.<sup>125</sup>

Road and river traffic were eclipsed upon the completion of the Hudson River Rail Road, which reached Sing Sing in September 1849. The market sloop would no longer be a significant means of transportation. Perhaps fully recognizing this, Captain Jenks of the *Seagull* placed an advertisement in the form of a lament:

So it goes! Things upside down! Steamboats and Railroad all bearing individual enterprises! Powerful monopolies! Yet I venture again soliciting a share of public patronage in the marketing business.<sup>126</sup>

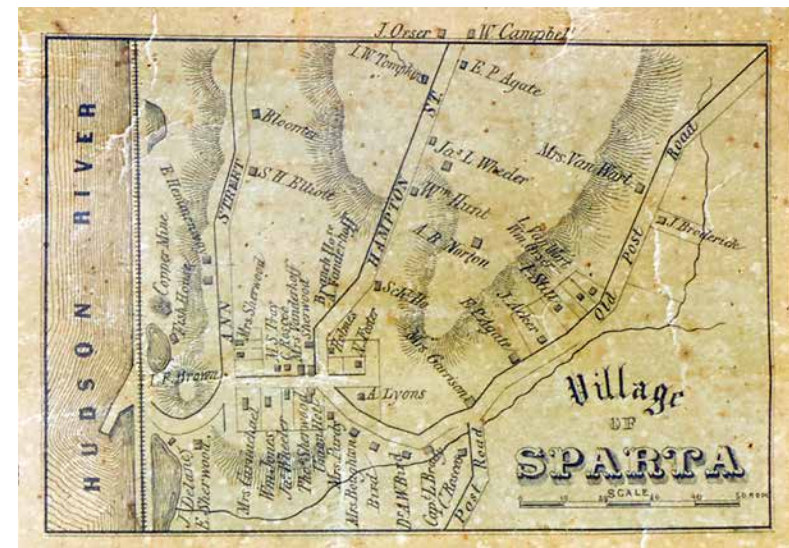
## EARLY SUBURBANITES

Suburban life was made practical by the railroad. Yet exurbanites had arrived in the Sparta area in the eighteen-thirties. One such person was Dr. William Creighton of Beechwood. He had been rector of St. Mark’s in the Bowerie, but resigned due to his wife’s ill health and moved to Beechwood in 1836. He became rector of Zion Church of Dobbs Ferry and Christ Church of Tarrytown. In 1839 he began services in a schoolhouse near Archville, the hamlet on the Albany Post Road which had been settled by laborers who had built the Croton Aqueduct several years earlier. In 1850, Creighton built St. Mary’s Church, which still stands. Creighton was among the first of the villa-builders who created the community of Scarborough.<sup>127</sup>

Another exurbanite of the same period brought brief notoriety to the Sparta area. A carpenter by the name of Robert Matthews had been conspicuous on New York City streets in the early eighteen-thirties, clad in strange clothing and haranguing anyone who would listen. Calling himself “Matthias,” he claimed to be a new Messiah and that he was ordained to erect a New Jerusalem.

Elijah Pierson and Benjamin Folger became his disciples. Folger lived at “Zion Hill,” later “Beechwood.” Matthias and Pierson came to live there in 1833, with Folger paying all the bills. Unfortunately, Folger went bankrupt. He accused Matthias of being an impostor; then, in July 1834, Pierson died after eating some berries Matthias had prepared. The Folgers ordered Matthias to leave and, soon after, they also became ill. Although Matthias was tried for Pierson’s murder in 1835, he was acquitted. The brief glare of lurid publicity soon faded from the Sparta area.<sup>128</sup>

Some Sparta residents, to be sure, gravitated toward New York City. Two sons of the storekeeper, Thomas Agate, became prominent artists of



ABOVE: Sparta in 1862. By 1862, Sparta had grown measurably, but only the Agate family of all those who helped to found the settlement remained in the area.

FOLLOWING PAGES: Sketch of Sparta from Mt. Murray (1873) by Ezra B. Hunt. This sketch of Sparta was apparently drawn to show how Rockledge Avenue and Liberty Street appeared about 1870 as seen from Mount Murray, where Scarborough Manor stands today. The original center section of Sparta’s most impressive home — No. 1 Rockledge Avenue — can be seen across the street (building with three windows). A fisherman who called himself Dr. Adam Bird lived at No. 10 Rockledge where he made “Dr. Bird’s Infallible Balm Ointment for the Cure of Piles.”



their day. Frederick Stiles Agate, born in 1803, showed great ability as a child in drawing animals, and at 15 went to New York to study drawing and painting under an English mezzotinter. He became a pupil of Samuel F. B. Morse at the Academy of Fine Arts in 1825. Rebelling against the academy's formalism, he helped organize a class that evolved into the National Academy of Design, of which he was long an official. He painted portraits and historical subjects and copied old masters, and he traveled extensively in Europe. His "Columbus and the Egg" is in the collection of the New York Historical Society.<sup>129</sup>

His brother, Alfred T. Agate, born in 1812, studied as a miniaturist in New York and also affiliated with the National Academy of Design. From 1838 to 1842 he served as the portrait and botanical artist for the U.S. Exploring Expedition led by Wilkes in South America, Antarctica, the Pacific, and the West Coast. His painting, "Cocoanut Grove," is owned by the National Academy of Design.<sup>130</sup>

At the same time that wealthy New Yorkers were beginning to create the Scarborough community, Sparta's population had begun to change. The gravestones in Sparta Burying Ground include a scattering of later immigrants from England who were not part of the original movement. The original settlers seem to have been displaced gradually, many of the English moving on to the Genesee. The 1850 and 1860 censuses, the first to carry the name, occupation, and birthplace of each person, give some idea of the changes, despite the near impossibility of determining which families on the list were within the community.

The 1850 census<sup>131</sup> shows only three families remaining of the original settlers. The Agates were still present: Hannah Agate, Thomas's widow, was living with two of her children, Edward and Harriet, the widow of Thomas Carmichael, back from Jefferson County, Wisconsin, where her husband had died. Thomas's brother John was also in Sparta. Mary Priestley, widow of another original settler, was head of a household which included a young man named Burgess, possibly a member of that original family. All the other family names are missing.

Most residents in 1850 were laborers of various kinds or guards at the prison. Two hotelkeepers, one of them Thomas Sherwood whose hotel was at 12 Liberty Street, are listed. Andrew Lyon, who lived at 1 Rockledge Avenue, was a weaver; James L. Wheeler of Spring Street was a shoemaker. There were also several quarrymen, and Erastus Hemminway was operating a "segar" factory that employed a number of local residents. Except for a scattering of the English-born, and a few Irish laborers, the residents were natives.

An interesting development was the presence of a number of free blacks. Bray Prince, who is thought to have built 338 Spring Street, was a black man of seventy years, born in Virginia. In his household were two unrelated black women. "Uncle Lew" Brady, 63, a black fisherman, lived with three others of his name and another young black woman from Virginia. Also in his household was Adam Bird, a 22-year-old English-

born white laborer, and two younger Birds, born in New York. Brady's house was just east of the Scarborough Manor gate house. The Census states that he was born in New York, although local tradition always calls him "from the Chesapeake." He is said to have planted an oyster bed in the river, the location of which was never disclosed. Two other black men, both laborers, lived elsewhere in the community.

In the 1860 census,<sup>132</sup> only members of the Agate family remained of the original settlers, and these Agates were born after the family came to Sparta. A greater number of river-oriented people were present than in 1850: Brady was still a fisherman, as were Nathaniel Foster and James Delaney. Brady's son John was a boatman, and William Jones was a "sea captain." Prison employees and laborers—both industrial and agricultural—are most numerous, but one native of Massachusetts was a carrier for the New York post office, which presumably required him to commute. William Campbell was a tobacconist, perhaps a successor to Hemminway, who had become a quarryman; Hemminway was also appointed a prison keeper in April 1863.<sup>133</sup> Thomas Sherwood and others in his household were operating a "refreshment saloon." Miles Stray was an English-born tailor; although there were other Englishmen, such as Bird, and the scattering of Irish laborers, the community was still mostly native.

Adam Bird was a curious person. Although he was clearly a fisherman, he called himself "Dr. Adam W. Bird" and is thus listed on 1862 and 1867 maps, living at 10 Rockledge Avenue, and he advertised in the *Sing Sing Republican* in 1861:

HAVE YOU READ IT?

WHAT!

DOCTOR BIRD'S

Pamphlet treatise on the cause and cure of  
PILES,

if not, without delay send for a copy, which  
can be had gratis, by addressing

Dr. Adam W. Bird

Sing Sing, N.Y.

Inventor and proprietor of Dr. Bird's Infallible  
Balm Ointment, for the cure of Piles.<sup>134</sup>

Later the Bird family moved to the foot of the cliff, near the Dock.

The most monumental event of nineteenth-century America was the Civil War, but because of Sparta's unincorporated status, it is nearly impossible to determine the extent of its citizens' involvement. Hemminway was one of a number of Westchester County citizens who had signed the following insertion in 1851, calling for support for the measures then taken:

The Union—It Must Be Preserved

“Liberty and Union, Now and Forever, One and Inseparable”  
 Our Fellow Citizens of Westchester County, without distinction of party, who approve of the Compromise Measures of the last session of Congress are invited to meet at the village of Tarrytown, on the 30th day of January, 1851, at noon, to express their determination to sustain those measures and their devotion to the Constitution and the Union of the United States.<sup>135</sup>

With similar sentiment, by 1862 Thomas Sherwood had given the name “Union Hotel” to his establishment at 12 Liberty Street. Another hostelry, called the “Branch House,” was then run by A. Vanderhoff at 11 Liberty Street.<sup>136</sup> In the 1850 census, Isaac F. Brown was listed as a merchant, and in 1867, Cypher and Slater, possibly a mercantile firm, was occupying the brick structure at 2 Rockledge, but with the exception of the saloons or hotels, commerce at Sparta was insignificant.<sup>137</sup>

## SCHOOL AND CHAPEL

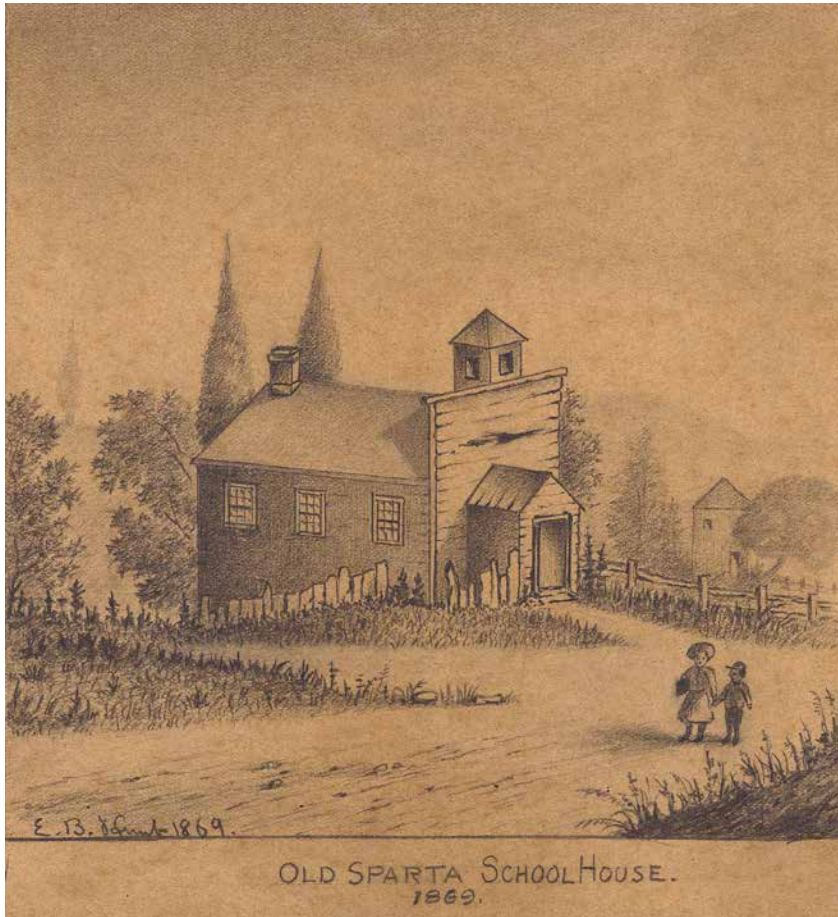
Nevertheless, two institutions were developing that provided a sense of community in Sparta until after the turn of this century. One was the Sparta School; the other, Calvary Chapel.

According to *Reminiscences of Ossining*, compiled by Florence Leary Reynolds in 1922, a schoolhouse was built at Sparta in 1840, with Thomas Agate and Peter U. Fowler as trustees.<sup>138</sup> These facts seems logical, but primary sources to authenticate them have not been found. From the earliest detailed map—1851—and all subsequent ones, it appears that the school always stood on the southeast corner of Spring Street and Fairview Place.

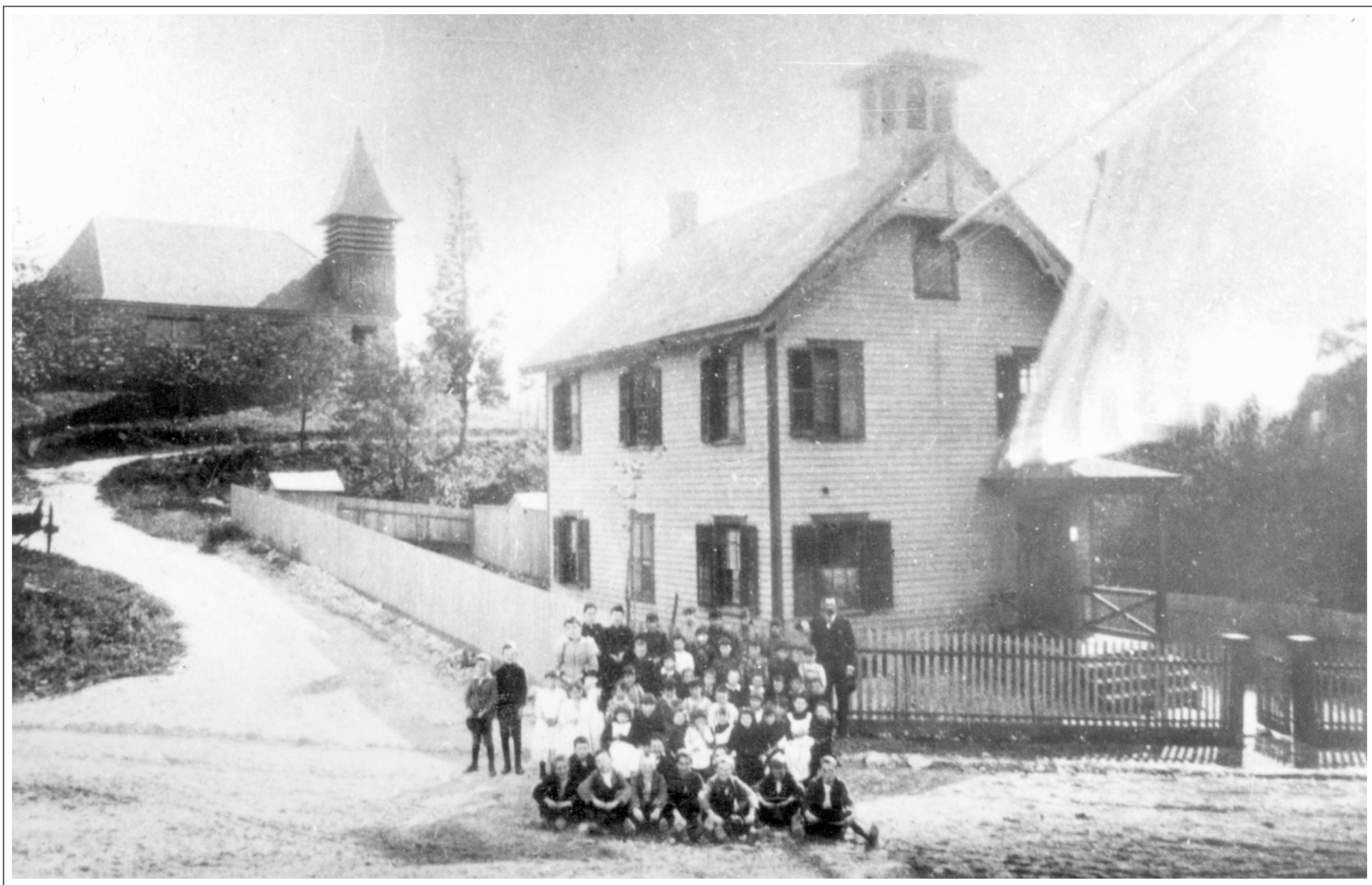
The school records of the Town of Ossining do provide, however, a record of the number of children over five and under sixteen in each school district for a twelve-year period. This period, 1845 to 1856, was one of rapid industrialization and growth, during which the railroad made dependable transportation a reality. The figures for the Village of Ossining (districts 1 and 4 until 1847, then district 1) and the hamlet of Sparta (district 3) are given below:

	<i>Ossining</i>	<i>Sparta</i>
1845	362 + 67	67
1846	418 + 128	64
1847	507	62
1848	514	74
1849	612	—
1850	616	89
1851	616	80
1852	930	108
1853	790	107
1854	954	95
1855	1003	84
1856	1276	104 <sup>139</sup>

The figures show clearly the rapid acceleration of growth encouraged by the railroad and that Sparta shared only to a small extent in the boom. Sparta District was designated District Number 2 as of January 6, 1862.<sup>140</sup>



ABOVE: Old Sparta School House. Drawn in 1869 by Ezra B. Hunt who lived up the street. The schoolhouse was built around 1840 as a one-room schoolhouse and stood at the southeast corner of Fairview Place and Spring Street.



ABOVE: Sparta School House, circa 1900.  
*Corner of Fairview Place and Spring street.  
Calvary Chapel can be seen at top of Fairview Place.*



The school was described by one of Mrs. Reynolds' informants as a square building with a little entry on one end. Around all four sides of the room was a raised platform and blackboards on the walls.<sup>141</sup> Myra (LeFevre) Acker attended the school until 1902 and remembers a yellow board fence surrounding it. There were classrooms on each of two floors, with four grades to a floor.<sup>142</sup>

Sparta School ceased to exist at some point after 1902, perhaps at the time Sparta was taken into the village. The structure was remodeled and incorporated in the home which stands today at 321 Spring Street.

Calvary Chapel, also called Union Chapel, had its beginnings as the Sparta Sunday School, said to have been organized in the 1860s at the corner of Spring and Liberty. It very likely originated, however, at the home of Mrs. Boorman, one of the well-to-do residents near Scarborough. Friday evening prayer meetings and Sunday evening services were held, primarily under auspices of the Sing Sing Presbyterian Church. At the time the two-story schoolhouse was built, Dr. Wilson Phraner loaned the town money to add a second story with the understanding that it was to be used by the Sunday School. Suppers, festivals, and entertainments were probably also held, although Myra (LeFevre) Acker does not recall them during her childhood.<sup>143</sup>

In the eighties, the Truesdells gave land for a chapel, and the superintendent of the Sunday School, considered a "mission" of the Sing Sing Church, opened discussion on May 2, 1887 at the church's meeting. The *Democratic Register* of September 22, 1888 announced:

The Union congregation of Sparta, that for years have held services in the Sparta school house, are about to build a chapel for their use. The structure is to be erected, we understand, on the hill east of the school house, a very fine and convenient location.<sup>144</sup>

The substantial chapel of natural stone, still standing at 11 Fairview Place, was constructed for a reported \$6500 in that year.<sup>145</sup>

During the nineties the Sunday School met Sunday afternoon at 2:30 with an average attendance of one hundred; total membership was 140. Friday evening prayer meetings were held as they had been for more than thirty years.<sup>146</sup>

Another mission project was begun in 1891 when an "Industrial School" was organized by Mrs. Martha Williams and Mr. Jacob De Baun, meeting Saturday afternoon at the chapel. Essentially, it was a sewing class. A report of 1894 states:

The Children have been taught to mend and sew neatly; 108 garments have been made and at Christmas each child had a gift of a white apron for her Mother, which made 65 more. A quilt also has been made and will be sent to Park College in the Autumn. The average attendance has been 50.<sup>147</sup>

A book containing examples of sewing for the children to copy is in the collection of the Ossining Historical Society.

The chapel, which was always run by a superintendent, was closed in 1918 because of declining membership. It was sold for a private home in 1923 for \$3700.<sup>148</sup>

At the turn of the century, Sparta was, according to Myra (LeFerre) Acker, still a relatively stable, close-knit community. The census of that year showed an increasing percentage of immigrants, although the older families — not the original settlers, but the later arrivals — were still very much in evidence. Of 84 self-supporting adults, thirty were born in England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, Sweden, or Austria, with the British Isles accounting for twenty-two of thirty foreign birthplaces. Employment was increasingly of the laboring kind — "laborious," Ralph Acker called it — but Sparta was also becoming the home of many farm and garden laborers. Many of the garden laborers worked either on estates in Scarborough or at the huge Pierson Nursery on the Post Road adjacent to Sparta. Some men were employed as limeburners or as coopers at the lime works, which was in high gear at the turn of the century.<sup>149</sup>

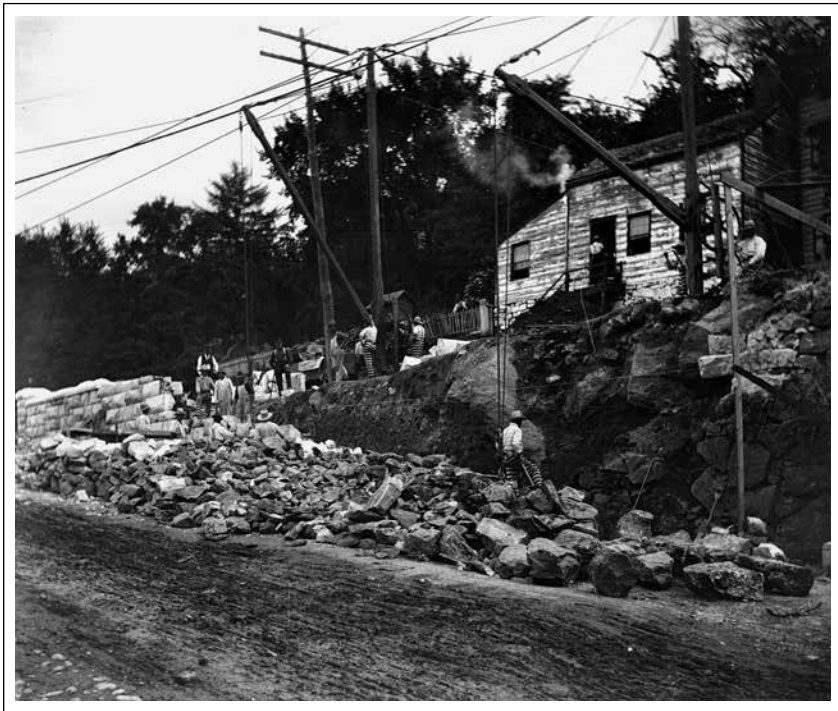


ABOVE: Calvary Chapel. Built in 1887 by Presbyterian Church of Sing Sing. Located at the top of Fairview Place, today it is a private home.

## LIME QUARRYING

Myra Acker remembers the quarry on Spring Street above Fairview Place as being very small in comparison to its present size. Limestone and marble were quarried and loaded on little railway cars which were pulled by a donkey on tracks which crossed Spring and Hudson Streets, and down the hill to kilns near a "New Sparta Dock," north of the original dock. Other kilns were located under the hill near the old dock. A small blacksmith shop serving the quarry was located at the northeast corner of Fairview Place.<sup>150</sup> Jackson, in Scharf's history, describes the uses to which the marble and limestone were put:

The marble has also been put to two other important uses. It has been extensively shipped as a flux for the reduction of iron ore; and thousands of tons have been burned in kilns, on the prison grounds [later, as above, near the docks] in the manufacture of builders' lime, of which is it said to be an excellent article.<sup>151</sup>



ABOVE: Sing Sing convicts working on Secor Road wall.  
*View looking south below the intersection of Main and Hunter Streets.*

The operation was under the control of the Sing Sing Lime Company. In the 1897 booklet, *The Town We Live In*, their operations were described:

Sing Sing lime is famous for its quality. The kilns of this company are a short distance below the prison. The quarries are back on Spring Street, north of the Sparta schoolhouse. The old prison quarry is no longer used. These quarries were started very early in the history of our town. During the first part of the century the convicts worked the quarries; but later passed into the hands of citizens. The Sing Sing Lime Company secured control of the plant in 1888. About fifty men are employed. The lime is burnt by what is known as the water gas process. The output for the last two years was about fifty thousand barrels of lime and twenty-five thousand tons of stone. This company employs a number of boats continually to transport their goods.<sup>152</sup>

By this time no produce was shipped from Sparta dock,<sup>153</sup> but the two docks were clearly important in the lime industry.

The kiln was apparently not an unmixing blessing to Sparta. On two occasions in 1905 the town health officer looked into a problem:

The health officer stated that he had received a complaint from a party at Sparta regarding the smoke from the Lime Kilns and upon investigating same found that it was a great source of complaint.<sup>154</sup>

The health officer said that he had another complaint about the smoke at Sparta, but that he had gone over the matter and did not see how we could stop same unless the Lime Kiln shut down.<sup>155</sup>

The limeworks closed after 1920.

Other residents at the turn of the century were, as Sparta men had been for generations, prison employees. Among many factory jobs in the area, those at Bay State Shoe and Leather Company were among the most important. The shoe shop was near the prison, in which it had been included until the end of convict contract labor a few years before 1900, when Ralph Acker went to work there.<sup>156</sup>

Only Adam Bird was listed as a fisherman in the 1900 census. The Ackers remember that Sparta residents fished for shad, bass, sturgeon, perch, sunfish, catfish, and eels and went crabbing as well. In 1915 only the Sampson family were fishermen; the Ackers recall them walking the streets crying, "Fresh shad, fresh shad!"<sup>157</sup>

The Birds, living at the foot of the cliff near the dock at what they called "Snug Harbor," were reduced to two brothers: Arthur, 54 in 1915, and Albert, 57. Artie ran a notions store, in which Mr. Acker and other



ABOVE: Sparta circa 1919. *View looking southeast from the hill that is today Riverview Court toward the intersection of Spring, Liberty, and Rockledge.*

youngsters could look over a collection of curiosities including a four-legged hen preserved in alcohol. Albert ran the boat livery.<sup>158</sup>

At the turn of the century there were only three commercial establishments: two saloons on Liberty Street, both run by Irishmen, and a grocery and general store run by Edgar Storms on the corner of Liberty and Spring. At the same intersection was the village pump, from which water was carried to the schoolhouse and other structures that lacked their own wells.<sup>159</sup>

One story that has been perpetuated but can apparently no longer be authenticated concerns the Washington Inn, supposedly the successor to the Union Hotel at 12 Liberty Street. Mrs. Reynolds wrote in 1922,

Its quaint old sign was still hanging up to within twenty-five years ago. . . . Three different effects are produced according to the position of the observer, by means of narrow strips of metal fastened at right angles to the sign board. From a point directly in front the head of George Washington was visible. On one side is the American eagle and on the other, the flag of our country.<sup>160</sup>

Mrs. Acker, cautiously, expressed her thought that she recalled seeing the sign as a little girl when sent to the pump by the schoolteacher.

## AMUSEMENTS

The social activities of Sparta residents, as recalled by Myra Acker, were simple ones, as would be expected in a relatively poor community. Games included dominoes, checkers, beanbag-tossing, and croquet. People gathered at homes for prayer meetings, quilting parties and molasses candy pulls. In the evening, rides to the Florence Inn in Tarrytown and back were popular; they were made in a buckboard filled with hay in warm weather, and in sleighs in cold. The Calvary Chapel held a Strawberry festival in June, and at the holidays its Christmas tree was decorated with candles. In winter, people skated on the river as far as Croton Point or even crossed the river to the west shore, and in summer, boys swam in the river. There was supposed to be a “hole” off Mount Murray where people occasionally were drowned.<sup>161</sup>

In 1900 Mount Murray was developed for the first time, as the site of a magnificent Queen Anne villa designed and owned by Clinton S. Arnold, an architect, civil engineer, and inventor.<sup>162</sup> Today, it is the location of Scarborough Manor.

## CHANGE COMES

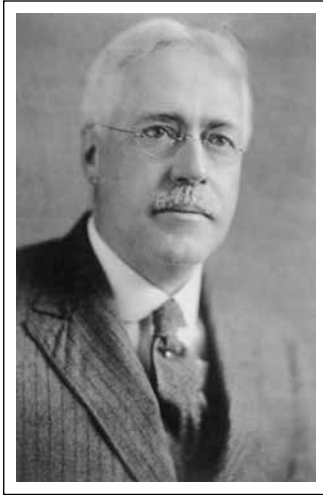
Sparta’s isolation came to an end early in this century, and considering the changes in Sparta that began to occur soon after, it is possible that the isolation had previously kept the community together. Although Spring Street had long linked Sing Sing (Ossining as of 1901) and Sparta, the prison had been both a physical and mental barrier between the two, and the village did not grow as far as Sparta until late in the nineteenth century. But on June 7, 1893 the Spring Street trolley line was completed to the top of Sparta Hill near Agate Avenue.<sup>163</sup> And in 1906, the Village of Ossining, incorporated in 1813, revised its village charter and extended its boundaries to include Sparta for the first time. The *Democratic Register* wrote,

. . . most all the residents favored an extension of the village boundaries. On three occasions an attempt had been made to extend the boundaries and failed because a few large taxpayers did not want it. . . .<sup>164</sup>

Whether the boundary change made the difference, or whether economic and other factors were more significant, Mrs. Acker does recall that a change in the population of Sparta began to occur. As the older generation died, the young people preferred to move uptown, which was considered a better place to live.<sup>165</sup> Houses in Sparta became vacant, and were offered for rent. The 1905 and 1915 county censuses show the gradual, but real, change.

In those two enumerations the economic status of the residents does not seem to have changed a great deal; the same mixture of laborers, factory employees, and service workers occur. The change, rather, occurs in its unity for Sparta was becoming home to a group of more recent immigrants. In 1905, sixty-nine heads of families included twenty foreign-born, of whom fourteen came from the British Isles and one from Italy. In 1915, sixty-five heads of families consisted of thirty-two foreign-born, and equal numbers—twelve of each—were natives of the British Isles and of Italy.<sup>166</sup>

The arrival of the Italians in Sparta took place in the decade following the completion of the Cornell Dam in 1905. The masonry work of the dam was largely a product of their skills, and the immigrants, little prepared for a new country, settled in Strangtown, now known as “the Hollow,” after the dam was completed. Sparta was something of an improvement for those who moved there when they were able to leave the overcrowded Strangtown.



Frank A. Vanderlip Sr.  
(1864-1937). *This  
portrait dates to 1917.*

## THE VANDERLIP PROJECT

For the story of Sparta's final change we have the testimony of Frank A. Vanderlip, Jr., son of the president of what is now First National City Bank. Always interested in projects that would benefit his family and community, Mr. Vanderlip, Sr. became involved with Sparta because of its proximity to his estate and its high crime rate.

In 1917, when young Frank was ten years old, Sparta was far less changed by the new century than neighboring communities had been. It was, Mr. Vanderlip says, "a slum" with unpaved streets and ill-kept houses packed much more closely together than they are today. It was believed to be the center of dope and liquor smuggling into Sing Sing Prison, and the house at 2 Rockledge, which had a grocery on the first floor, was believed to contain a house of prostitution on its upper floors. The elder Vanderlips spoke of "the regular Saturday night murder" in Sparta.

Mr. Vanderlip made his first move: a social worker by the name of Miss Constance Tinker was hired about 1918. She was stout and jovial and labored among the Sparta residents but, says Mr. Vanderlip, "Miss Tinker was *not* a success."

Thereupon Mr. Vanderlip and his wife launched themselves on a project which was, whether they realized it or not, rather advanced in its concept. They determined to buy up Sparta, select the best dwellings, and tear down the others. They would then move the remaining houses to assure good siting, "re-do" them, and offer them for rent.<sup>167</sup> It was an urban redevelopment project, though no precedent was probably known to the Vanderlips.

Secrecy, was, of course, essential. Mr. Vanderlip recalls hearing his parents discuss the project quietly in the greenhouse. Their "number two greenhouse man," who lived at 6 Rockledge, apparently overheard them, for he held out against the offers of Vanderlip's general manager, Harrison J. Slaker, sent to purchase the houses. There were other holdouts: 10 Rockledge was not obtained; Mickey Zerella, who lived at 4 Liberty, was proud of his new home and would not sell. Some houses below Hudson Street, owned by fishermen, were not sought.<sup>168</sup> But between December, 1919 and February, 1922, Frank A. and Narcissa C. Vanderlip acquired title to a great many parcels of Sparta real estate.<sup>169</sup>

The firm of Shreve, Lamb and Harmon, with the special attention of Mr. Harmon, began the "restoration" of the houses.<sup>170</sup> Actually, the alterations on some, such as 12 Liberty, were drastic, and that building's curved brick facade (it had previously been foursquare and wooden) is more reminiscent of colonial Virginia than of federal New York. In 1922 it was being used as a reading room by St. Mary's Church.<sup>171</sup>

The news seems to have reached the papers about November 28, 1920, when the *Sunday World* of New York published a somewhat romanticized article which misinterpreted Vanderlip's motive as being the provision of housing for the teachers at his Scarborough School. On December 4, it was reprinted in Ossining by *The Democratic Register*.

Soon Vanderlip had a "charming" community, one with great appeal to intellectuals of limited means, much as Greenwich Village did and does. By the time of the 1925 census, professionals were resident in Sparta, which had been almost entirely working people for generations. Harry Hopkins and John Gebhart were social workers. Donald B. Armstrong was a physician at the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, and his wife was a psychologist; Henry Stillman was a theatrical director, and Lucas Foster was an accountant.<sup>172</sup> At least one Scarborough School teacher, Ethel Wharton of the Latin classes, lived there, and others lived at the edge of the hamlet on Revolutionary Road where Vanderlip had preceded his Sparta project by building several houses specifically for teachers, south of Sparta Brook.<sup>173</sup>

Sparta's cycle was complete. Scarborough Properties, the Vanderlip corporation, began the dispersal of Sparta to private owners over three decades ago, a process completed only recently. But the houses are and have been in the hands of families who care about them. The final assurance was written into village law on May 6, 1975 when the "Sparta Historic and Architectural Design District" was adopted. No change may be made in a facade without prior approval of the village's Planning Board. Application is now being made to have the area added to the National Register of Historic Districts, and this would further assure the preservation of Sparta as it is today.



ABOVE: Sparta circa 1920. *View west down Liberty Street in Sparta toward the Hudson River. 12 Liberty Street on left has been renovated by Frank Vanderlip, Sr.*



ABOVE TOP: 1 Rockledge Avenue. *Original portion of house built circa 1790 for Josiah Rhodes, who operated the mustard mill on Sparta Brook with his partner William Kemeyers. Two wings were added onto the original central portion in 1921 by Frank Vanderlip Sr.* ABOVE BOTTOM: 9 Liberty Street. *Built in 1855 on the opposite side of the street, this house is shown with the porch facing Liberty Street. Today the house is turned sideways to face the river, a change made during Vanderlip's renovations.*

ABOVE TOP: 7 Liberty Street. *One of the earlier structures in Sparta, built before 1820, it has had extensive renovation.* ABOVE BOTTOM: 2 Liberty Street. *This house, built by one of the founding families, the Agates, was built before 1820. During the Vanderlip renovation, the wrought-iron fence came from the old Custom House in New York.*

## NOTES

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## ILLUSTRATIONS AND CREDITS

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*The Jug Tavern of Sparta, 2014. In 1976 The Jug Tavern was added to the National Register of Historic Places and was owned by the Town of Ossining, and maintained by the Ossining Restoration Committee. In 1986, the title to the Jug Tavern was passed to Jug Tavern of Sparta, Inc., a tax exempt not-for-profit cooperation whose sole purposes is to preserve the historic building.*