Kingston’s Four Historic Districts

In 1652, an English carpenter, Thomas Chambers, and Dutch settlers joined the local inhabitants, Indians of the Delaware nation, in farming on the rich lands along the Esopus Creek, 100 miles north of Manhattan. The settlement was named Wilwycycks (“Wild Woods”) by the Dutch-speaking settlers. The first buildings were crude, temporary, and scattered. After skirmishes with the Esopus Indians, Peter Stuyvesant brought soldiers up from Manhattan to build a stockade fence and ordered the settlers to live within it. Over time, they built houses in a style similar to their homeland, using the local gray-white limestone. The village was renamed Kingston.

In 1777, after Kingston became the first capital of the new State of New York, the British punished its citizens by setting their houses on fire. The stone houses were rebuilt; many still stand in present-day uptown Kingston.

In the 19th century, a new village grew up on the Rondout Creek and, in 1872, merged with the older village into the City of Kingston. Hundreds of residences and commercial buildings arose in styles influenced by architects and builders of the Hudson Valley. Today, many of these buildings survive and are still in use. They tell the story of two New York State villages, of the rise and fall of industries, of changes in building methods and styles, and of the way that stones and mortar merge with mountains, river and sky to form a living record of a place in time.

The Buildings

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John Vanderlyn. On Wall Street, the Ulster County Courthouse marks the site where George Clinton as the first state chief justice in 1777. In was sworn in as New York State’s first governor and County slave, gained her son’s freedom from slavery the courthouse in 1821, Sojourner Truth, an Ulster visible part of the Rondout neighborhood.

The most visible building in the Stockade District is the ground contains the graves of many Revolutionary War soldiers and Governor George Clinton. Opposite, the c. 1812 Fred J. Johnston House features a collection of American decorative arts, and the Friends of Historic Kingston Museum offers exhibits related to local history and the arts. The Volunteer Firemen’s Hall and Museum is on Fair Street. The neighborhood is rich in restaurants, specialty shops and art galleries.

A self-guided walking tour of the Stockade District is available.

As Rondout grew, a number of its affluent businessmen and professional people built homes at the top of the hill on West Chestnut Street. The first house on the street (about 1850) was that of James McEntee, the resident engineer for the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company. His son, Jerrie, a painter of the Hudson River School, also lived here. Among surviving houses are those of Henry Samson, a leather tanner; James Van Duzen, who made patent medicine; and George Coykendall, head of the city’s trolley line. The architecture spans American styles from the Italian Villa through Colonial Revival and later styles. The historic district includes one block on Broadway and the block-long Stuyvesant Street. To the west of the district at the very end of Chestnut Street, a turnaround provides a broad view of Rondout and its bridges, the Rondout Lighthouse, and the Hudson. Buried in the picturesque Montrose Cemetery a block away are many of Rondout’s early residents as well as frequent visitors, the architect, Calvert Vaux. A separate walking tour brochure is available.