

A Walking Tour
FROM THE TAPPAN SLOTE
TO PIERMONT
1609 TO 2016



A Story of a Village and Its River

A five and a half mile tour that can be done
by the ambitious in about three hours.



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- 1 SITE 1: THE FLYWHEEL
- 2 SITE 2: LAST STOP USA & THE WATCH FIRES
- 3 SITE 3: PEGGY'S POINT
- 4 SITE 4: THE DRAWBRIDGE
- 5 SITE 5: ROCKLAND ROAD BRIDGE HISTORIC DISTRICT
- 6 SITE 6: HADDOCK'S HALL
- 7 SITE 7: MINE HOLE DISTRICT
- 8 SITE 8: THE PIERMONT RAILROAD STATION
Join us at the Museum of the History of Piermont at the Railroad Station. Check piermonthistorysociety.org for open dates
- 9 SITE 9: THE ONDERDONK HOUSE
- 10 SITE 10: FORT COMFORT INN & RESORT

MAP NOT DRAWN TO SCALE

Map courtesy of Piermont Chamber of Commerce

INTRODUCTION

Many Piermont residents and tourists know Piermont as that idyllic small river village uniquely situated parallel to the Hudson River and at the junction of its tributary, the Sparkill Creek. They know it for its river views, its many restaurants, its numerous shops and art galleries. Few know of its early beginnings, its industrial past and its commercial significance to the country, or of its rich heritage and role in the American Revolution.

While walking this tour, you will sense the close connection between the river and the village. Although this tour does not pretend to present a definitive history of Piermont, the Piermont Historical Society hopes to encourage the reader to seek more information. The walk centers on 10 historic sites, including five of the nine in Piermont that are on the National Register of Historic Places.

Start at Piermont Village Hall and go north on Piermont Avenue. Turn right onto Ash Street; then turn left onto Flywheel Park.

On your left is the Dennis P. McHugh Piermont Public Library, named after a New York City fireman who died on 9/11.

SITE 1: THE FLYWHEEL

On your right is Flywheel Park—the village green of Piermont. On the southeast corner of the park is the flywheel. It was to be demolished along with the factory that housed it, but fortunately it was built too well, and the wrecker's ball just bounced off. The flywheel's momentum gave the machinery at the plant the uniform rotational speeds needed and was part of a steam-driven electric generator that produced electricity for the plant. So there it stands, stubbornly recalling the village's proud industrial past.

In 1902 the Piermont Paper Company began operations. The mill employed several generations and transformed the village into a significant commercial and industrial town for over 80 years. In 1920, the Robert Gair Company of Brooklyn merged with the paper company. Gair had developed a new way to cut, crease and fold paperboard in one operation. Using the new method, a factory could now produce more cartons in two and a half hours than the entire plant had in one day. The mill remained unchanged until 1956 when the Robert Gair Company merged with the Continental Can Company.



Fly Wheel



Paper Mill

Take the path alongside the waterfront and walk east.

When you reach the North Shore Walkway sign, the building just in front of you is the only remaining building from the paper mill.

The water is brackish (has salt) because, as an estuary, the tidal movements of the Atlantic Ocean affect the Hudson. As a result of this tidal action, the waters of the Hudson can actually travel two directions at once. The local Indians called the river Muhheakunnuk or “water that flows both ways.”

Continue east along Ferry Road.

Depending on the height of the tide, you may see the remains of a variety of docks that were built as steamship and ferry landings.

SITE 2: LAST STOP USA & THE WATCH FIRES

During World War II, the pier was the embarkation point for over a half-million GIs who would fight in the European theater, and at the end of the war, the debarkation point for those returning. A “Last Stop” memorial, called GI Joe, is located in Kennedy Memorial Park.

Every Memorial Day, since the Vietnam Veterans started the watch fire tradition in 1987, massive logs are piled approximately 30 feet high and are lit for a 24-hour period. The watch fires are lit along the ridge of the Palisades. They symbolically light the way home for those soldiers who have died in all wars and conflicts of the United States.



GIs boarding a ship



WACs boarding a ship

From the end of the pier, you have a panoramic view of the Hudson. To the north you can see Hook Mountain and the Tappan Zee Bridge, and across the river to the east is Westchester County, where you can see Tarrytown and Irvington.

Return to the Village west along Ferry Road.

Returning along Ferry Road, on your right you will see the memorial site of Fred C. Scheffold, a resident of Piermont and a FDNY Battalion Chief, who perished on 9/11. Here to the south and west is the salt marsh. Under years of vegetation is an 1824 wharf that was constructed by Judge Cornelius Blauvelt. He extended Paradise Avenue through the salt marsh then built a 500-foot pier—a wood plank wharf—into the river. Several buildings were erected on this wharf. It was later discarded and the current pier was constructed by the Erie Railroad. The remains of the wharf can still be seen on the south side of the current pier.

SITE 3: PEGGY'S POINT

At the west end of the wharf was Peggy's Inn, hence Peggy's Point. It was here that sloops, waiting for high tide, were moored before going up the Sparkill Creek. Legend has it that Peggy's Inn served more than just food, drink and lodging. The old foundations of Peggy's Inn still can be seen in a clump of trees east-southeast of the old village dump, behind the Little League field.

Continue along Ferry Road and turn left onto Paradise Avenue.



Peggy's Point



Sloops in Sparkill

On your left is the Sparkill Creek. It is here that the Hudson River sloops sailed, were pulled or dragged up the creek to reach the interior where the current Rockland Road Bridge now is located. The indigenous reeds were locally referred to as “marsh grass.” It is said that the Sparkill Creek gets its name because all that

could be seen of these vessels, as they traveled up the creek through the tall marsh grass, were the top of the masts or “spars.” Note the three informational signs on your left that give a description of the estuary, as well as the historical marker in front of the Sneden house on your right at 38 Paradise Avenue.

When you reach the intersection, cross the street and continue west onto South Piermont Avenue.

SITE 4: THE DRAWBRIDGE

On your left, just past the Post Office, is the old Piermont Drawbridge. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1981 and restored in 2009. Built in 1880 by the King Iron Bridge Company, it is a single-leaf, manually-operated metal drawbridge that was built to allow traffic to continue up the Sparkill Creek.

The bridge is remarkably unaltered. It is “...the only known example of its type and period in New York State.”⁽¹⁾ This hand-operated mechanical drawbridge retains the integrity of its original design, including its timber deck and simple, weight-driven elevating mechanism.



Drawbridge

Continue west on Piermont Avenue. Here begins the old part of Piermont.

On your right is 376 S. Piermont Avenue c. 1780, known as the Guglicimello house. In 1999 it received the Preservation Merit Award from the Historical Society of Rockland County. Further along on your right is 352 Piermont Avenue c. 1780, which received the same award in 2007. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2015. It is said to have harbored Aaron Burr on his flight to Canada after his duel with Alexander Hamilton.

Continue to the next intersection.

SITE 5: ROCKLAND ROAD BRIDGE HISTORIC DISTRICT, "THE BIRTHPLACE OF PIERMONT"

This is the oldest and most historic district of Piermont and many of the surrounding buildings have maintained their 19th-century character. It is here that Piermont, as a commercial entity, took root. In 2012 this district was listed on The National Register of Historic Places. The Rockland Road Bridge, Haddock Hall and Ferdon Hall are listed individually. Possibly the oldest house in Piermont, number 272-c 1730, was formerly a tavern and believed to have hosted Washington.

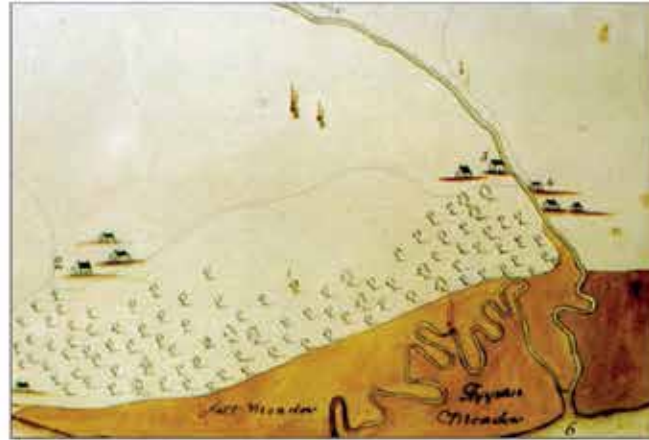
(See the two informational signs on the bridge.)

The Rockland Road Bridge, built in 1874 and restored in 2011, is the only surviving stone and single-span, brick-arched bridge in Rockland County and one of the only three remaining in New York State. It is a significant and intact example of a 19th-century masonry and brick structure. The materials were quarried locally.

The Tappan Slote, also called the Sparkill Cut, at that time was the only water passage north of New York City which allowed sloops to get on the western side of the Palisades ridge. (Note the palisades on your left and right.) Going through the Slote was the most efficient way that goods, material and people could travel between NYC and the interior of the nation. Around 1740, the Sparkill Creek was deepened and rerouted so that at high tide fully loaded sloops could navigate the Slote successfully, or during low tide they could be dragged by men to the mouth of the river.

A 1745 map of the area shows a cluster of four buildings, one of which was Henry Ludlow's gristmill. From the center of the bridge looking west you can see the millpond, which still exists to this day. It was at this location, at the end of navigation, that the sloops would transfer their materials to land, making it the perfect location for a store.

Abraham Mabie, the first known storeowner in this district, operated a general store and gristmill long before the Revolution. In 1783, Major Peter Taulman took over Mabie's general store. In 1805, Taulman rebuilt the store that is now 239 Piermont



Ludlow map

Avenue, on the creek just west of the bridge. The Tappan Slote (Piermont) henceforth was called Taulman's Landing. In 1856, Roger Haddock purchased the store from Taulman and it is suspected that Haddock built the mansard roof and converted the building into stables. This building is located just west of the bridge, on the left, across from Canzona's Deli. (Note the front door and window above.)

SITE 6: HADDOCK'S HALL

Haddock's Hall, known locally as the Silk Mill, was built in 1876 and listed in 1990 on the National Register of Historic Places. It is historically and architecturally significant as a rare example of a combination of civic and commercial use. Historically, it served as Piermont's village hall, library, music hall and general store from 1876 to 1900. Architecturally, it has retained its integrity.

Haddock's Hall has had a variety of uses and owners, and until the construction of the railroad, Haddock's Hall and the creek were the center of the Village. In 1900, it became Hasbrouck Motor Works, making motors for yachts. In 1917, sewing machine operators made clothing on the first floor and the Village Hall was on the second floor. From 1926 to 1975, it was used as a textile mill. During the war years, 1940 to 1945, rip cords for parachutes were made here. The final commercial owner was the Crescent Ribbon Mill Company which operated from c.1960 to 1970. In 1976, the mill put the building up for sale and it is now a private residence.

In 1916 the creek side of Haddock's Hall was converted to a Venetian canal for the movie, *The Hungry Heart*, which was based on the French play *Frou Frou*. It was the first time that Piermont was used by the film industry. Since then, other movies have been made in Piermont, most notably, Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. Most recently Piermont has been the site for TV episodes of *Law & Order: SVU*, *The Blacklist*, *The Following*, and *Orange is the New Black*.



Haddock's Hall



The Hungry Heart

Continue west on Piermont Avenue.

SITE 7: MINE HOLE DISTRICT

The Mine Hole is the name of a mine and also the name of this district of Piermont. It goes from the Rockland Road Bridge to Valentine Avenue on the north side of the creek. African Americans inhabited this district since long before the Revolution.

When you reach 175 S. Piermont Avenue, look across the street and you will see the entrance to the mine. The mine consists of two shafts. One shaft is 75 feet long and served as a fresh water spring until 1940. The second shaft is described as a straight, narrow excavation through bedrock.

In the early 1970s, in recognition of the site's historic importance, a new concrete portico and fence were installed and the old sign restored. In the spring of 1975, the mine was sealed.

Continue west and make a left on Valentine Avenue.

Just south of Union Street, on your right, is the rear of Christ Church. It is the oldest Episcopal Church in Rockland County and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2011.

The current church was built in 1864 and is of gothic architecture with a Norman-influenced interior.



Mine Hole



Boss Icehouse

Pause at the skating pond on your left.

John Moore, a wheelwright, also operated a sawmill here. It was the site of the first commercial development in Piermont. The foundation walls of the sawmill still can be seen on the east side of the current skating pond. In 1815, William Ferdon purchased the mill and made woolen blankets there until 1860.

On the northwest corner is the St. Charles African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. In 1897, two local black churches joined together: the Skunk Hollow Mountain Church of Colored People and the Swamp Church of Palisades. Cross the street and read the marker describing the history of the church.

Make a left on Ferdon Avenue.

As you walk east past the skating pond, on your left is the Brookfield Wildlife Sanctuary. Once you have passed the Wildlife Sanctuary, look across the creek to the backs of the buildings of the Mine Hole District. The buildings that you saw when you were walking on Piermont Avenue are not what they seemed. What appeared to be one or two-story buildings are actually three or four-story buildings as they stretch down to the creek.

One of the more interesting stories of the Mine Hole is a duplex outhouse—one outhouse directly above the other. *How could this work?* If you are on top there is no problem; but if you are below while someone is above, it could pose a problem. The issue was solved because each seat had its own tin chute emptying directly into the creek below.⁽⁷⁾

Continue along Ferdon Avenue and return to the Rockland Road Bridge.

When you reach the bridge, look to your right. At the southwest corner is 277 Ferdon Avenue. This Greek Revival Temple house with Ionic columns was built by William Ferdon, c.1840. It was recently restored and expanded with such care that the new faithfully resembles the old.

On the southeast corner of Ferdon Avenue, and set back from the road, is 20 Rockland Road, a restored Victorian building built in 1850. Locals remember this building as the home and laboratory of Mr. Sparhawk, a chemist and inventor. The story goes that during WWII he developed odors that prevented US soldiers from being tracked by hounds. It is rumored that in order to obtain his odors, he trapped an unknown number of skunks whose bones periodically still turn up.

Continue east along Ferdon Avenue.

Houses with numbers 325, 335, 337, 339, 341, and 345 were built as housing for the Erie Railroad workers. Although the house at 325 was renovated, its interior still has much of the original design. Further east on the south side of the street is Piermont's Reformed Church, originally established in 1839 with the support of Eleazer Lord.

Cross the creek over the Army Bridge and go to the northwest corner of Piermont Avenue.

This is JFK Memorial Park. The statue is called GI Joe and is a "Last Stop" memorial. This park is where the annual Memorial Day observations and other civic events are held.

Note the cannon. Found in the river many years ago by local kids, it is believed to be of Revolutionary War vintage.

Walk further north to the intersection of Piermont and Tate Avenues.

Turn left up Tate Avenue, passing the wall art on the building on the right.

This street is representative of the very hilly nature of Piermont. This area is also very typical of Piermont in that many buildings are built on steep slopes and winding roads. In fact, many of the buildings in Piermont were built before zoning and planning codes, thus giving the impression that all the buildings have been constructed in a haphazard manner. This may be true, but it is also part of Piermont's charm.

STEPS TO ERIE PATH:

On the left take the concrete steps and gravel path up the hill. This is the path that people used to get to the railroad station.

Cross Ash Street at the top of the stairs.

SITE 8: THE PIERMONT RAILROAD STATION: THE TALE OF TWO RAILROADS

THE NORTHERN RAILROAD AND THE RESTORED PIERMONT RAILROAD STATION:

This is the route of the Northern RR of New Jersey. Built in 1859, The Northern was a commuter train which originally went from Jersey City to Sparkill and then west to the Village of Piermont. In 1869 the Northern was extended north from Sparkill to Nyack. Not until 1873, when the Piermont RR Station was constructed, did the train stop here. It continued to run passengers along this route for 107 years until it ceased operations in 1966.



Piermont railroad station



Belle Kelly

Belle Kelly worked for the railroad for over 50 years. She served as stationmaster, ticket agent and telegraph clerk, servicing 43 trains a day. In 2008, the station was listed on the National Register

SITE 8 CONT'D

of Historic Places. It is the only known remaining station of its kind. It was restored by the Piermont Historical Society and is now the home of the Museum of the History of Piermont. The Northern RR should not be confused with the Erie RR. Each operated on two separate sets of tracks intersecting only in Sparkill.

THE ERIE RAILROAD AND THE INFLUENCE OF ELEAZAR LORD

Eleazar Lord may well be the single most influential person in the history of Piermont because of his leadership in the development of the Erie railroad. By filling almost 100 acres of the Hudson River, he created a strong and stable foundation for the railroad buildings, tracks and pier. In 1838 he extended the pier 4,000 feet. He established Piermont's infrastructure and changed its very nature. This infrastructure would eventually prepare the ground for construction of the paper mill and for commercial and passenger use of steamboats and ferries.

In 1832, New York State chartered the New York Erie Railroad. Completed in 1851, a passenger arriving by steamboat from Battery Park in NYC would board a train at the end of the Pier and travel 447 miles to Dunkirk located on Lake Erie—at that time the longest railroad in the world. President Millard Fillmore and Daniel Webster made the inaugural trip from Piermont to Dunkirk. In 1852, however, restrictions on interstate transportation ended and in 1863, the railroad terminus was moved from Piermont to Jersey City, NJ.

Often forgotten is that Eleazar Lord gave the Village its name. In 1839, he renamed Taulman's Landing to Piermont, evoking the marriage between the pier and the mountains.



Eleazar Lord

Descend Ash Street onto Hudson Terrace. Continue along on Hudson Terrace.

Hudson Terrace is one of several streets in Piermont where the buildings have been cut into the Palisades. At 143 Hudson Terrace is a Greek Revival-style house that was originally the home of an Erie Railroad executive. The building later became the Piermont Library. In recent years, after the construction of the new Dennis P. McHugh Public Library, it has returned to private ownership.

Make a right at Ritte Street and descend the hill to Piermont Avenue.

Upon reaching the corner, just on the right, one can see a stone marker commemorating the events that took place at this site.

SITE 9: THE ONDERDONK HOUSE

Built c.1737, 758 Piermont Avenue was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2006. The Onderdonk House is an outstanding example of lower Hudson Valley domestic architecture, illustrating the regional preference for native stone construction in the 18th and early 19th century and the transition between Dutch and English building practices.

The structure was neglected for many years and was slated to be condemned by 2014. In the 11th hour it was saved by new owners and carefully rebuilt. Original stones were conserved and reused. A stone to the left of the entrance inscribed with the date 1810 was returned to the original location as were all the corner stones.



Onderdonk house



Washington / Carleton

"In the summer of ...1777—two (British) boats attempted to land at the present day Piermont ...After a sharp conflict with the Shore Guard (local militia) they were repulsed with three killed. Several of the Shore Guard were wounded, but none fatally."⁽²⁾

In May 1783, somewhere in the vicinity of the Onderdonk House, General George Washington and Sir Guy Carlton, the Commander of the British forces in New York, met before they went to the Dewitt house in Tappan to negotiate the withdrawal of the British forces from New York. Daniel Onderdonk was an ensign in the Revolution.⁽⁴⁾

Make a right on to Piermont Avenue. Walk south past the Onderdonk property.

SITE 10: FORT COMFORT INN & RESORT

On your right, you will see a set of puddingstone pillars. Enter here and walk up the hill. At the top of the hill on your left you will see a crenellated curved battlement. This road continues and exits back onto Piermont Avenue, where you will find another set of pillars. These two sets of pillars were the gateposts that flanked a semi-circle drive. The battlements and the puddingstone pillars are all that remain of Fort Comfort Inn.

FORT COMFORT INN:

In the early 1900s, the Fort Comfort Realty Company owned by George De Groat, purchased and converted the Fallon Mansion into Fort Comfort Inn. It was advertised as *"...high-class service; beautiful surroundings, caters especially to tourists; open all year..."*⁽⁵⁾ Thus began the first use of Piermont as a major tourist destination. Business flourished and soon the Inn was expanded. On September 6, 1912 the building was destroyed by fire, but soon after was rebuilt into two separate buildings. However, a series of fires, changes in ownership, and a final fire in June, 1931 brought it all to an end.

FORT COMFORT RESORT AND PAVILION:

A quote from a 1902 publication, the Bi-Annual Directory of the Nyacks and Piermont, reads: *"The Fort Comfort Beach is the most desirable place on the Hudson River for bathing. The clean, fine sandy bottom sloping gradually for long distance, absolutely safe for small children. A modern Bathing Pavilion*



Fort Comfort Inn



Fort Comfort Inn Pavilion

lighted by electricity for bathing at night has about one hundred large booths furnished with showers and foot baths and a very large assortment of suites for hire. Fort Comfort is a strictly first class resort in every respect and is patronized by people of wealth and refinement."



The remains of Fort Comfort Inn



Sturgeon

Continue walking south toward the village. Further on your left is Cornetta's Marina and Restaurant.

Above you, in the main entrance, as you walk into the restaurant, hangs a mounted sturgeon—one of the largest ever caught in the Hudson River. It is the only remembrance of a time, not long ago, when Piermont was a thriving fishing village. There's always been fishing off the Piermont shores. The Lenape Indians taught the Dutch how to fish the river and they in turn taught future generations.

The Hudson River had been regarded as having one of the greatest populations of fish in the world, but during the 1980's, environmental issues caused commercial fishing to decline precipitously. Today few fishermen remain.

Continue walking south toward the Village.

The building just before the firehouse on your right, 556 Piermont Ave, is an architectural work of art in progress. It may be the only one in the Nation dedicated to the Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem and the history and culture of Malta. Begun around 1989, it depicts momentous historic epics of the Knights of Saint John and conveys the noble heritage of the Islands of Malta.

Continue straight, returning to the Village Hall.



Village Hall

END OF TOUR

Adapted from *"From the Tappan Slote to Piermont 1609 to 2009,"* written by Richard Esnard for The Piermont Historical Society

Please go to piermonthistorysociety.org to learn more about the Piermont Historical Society and the history of Piermont

END NOTES

1. United States Department of Interior National Park Services, National Register of Historic Places
2. Stories from the Mine Hole, Rockland County Historical Society, 2003. Leonard C. Cook and Audrey S. Lawson
3. The History of Rockland County, A.S. Barnes & Co. 1886, Frank B. Green
4. On the Highroad to Nyack and Piermont; Glimpses of the Old Haring Homestead which the British attacked in 1777, June 11, 1916
5. Piermont Three Centuries

COVER PAGE ARTWORK

Francis A. Silva, 1835-1886
The Hudson at the Tappan Zee, 1876,
Courtesy of the Brooklyn
Museum of Art

