

# Historic Walking Tour of Cornwall, NY

Founded in 1764, Cornwall is among the oldest Hudson River towns. Its prime location was noted during Henry Hudson's first voyage - "a pleasant Place to build a Towne on". Nestled at the foot of Storm King Mountain it provided the first deep harbor north of the treacherous Highlands. The railroads that came in the 1860's further affirmed Cornwall's role in transportation and commerce. Its citizens reflect strong the religious convictions, business acumen and community spirit that are the hallmarks of America.

Nathaniel P. Willis, prominent author of a bygone era, extolled the scenic virtues of the place, and here he built his showcase home - Idlewild - above Cantlerbury Brook. His writings led to an interest in the town as a resort area. The invigorating mountain air promised to improve the health of thousands of summer visitors from the learning metropolis of New York, with the result that hotels, guest houses and camps flourished. Small as it is, Cornwall has its own hospital - testament to that tradition of valuing health.

Over time, much has been lost to fire, neglect or the demands of progress, but there has been a fascinating chronicling of times past by town historians. One way to savor this history is to take a leisurely walk through town. While the scale of the buildings remains consistent for a small town, the variety of architectural features provides a look at a vital history that has been preserved. There are many structures in Cornwall that are on the National Register of Historic Places (denoted by an H). The physical remnants of this history must be celebrated. The aim of this short walking tour is to introduce some of these small treasures. The hope is that these mostly inconspicuous homes, places of worship, commercial and other buildings will be valued so that this community can preserve its past as it forges its future.

This brochure describes two routes of varying lengths through the area known as Cantlerbury or the Upper Village. The basic tour is about 2 miles, which can be augmented by 2 optional legs, each about 1 mile in

length, depending upon physical stamina. And please respect the privacy of the current residents or owners. Begin the tour at:

**1. Sands King Homestead (H).** This home, built by a Quaker preacher, is the heart of historic Cornwall. Dating from around 1760 and kept in the same family for many generations, it is a fine example of a pre-Revolutionary War farmhouse. It served as a meeting place in its early days and continues to be a town focal point where community fairs, dances and classroom instruction have long taken place.

Walk southwest on Main Street past a block of fine Victorian houses. When you reach Willow Ave, turn right and continue until you reach Willow Avenue Middle School, where directly across the street is:

**2. Oliver Brewster Homestead (H).** Home of one of the early town supervisors, it dates from the mid-19th century. The extensive vineyards behind the house made Brewster one of the first commercial grape growers in the Hudson Valley.

The next place is optional - part of the longer tour. For those able to walk the extra mile, continue on Willow one block past the Rte 9W intersection to:

**3. Fink-Little Fire House (H).** (Currently Janet's Head Quarters). This is an exquisite miniature dating from the early 20th century. Firthcliffe was a thriving industrial community in need of its own fire house.

Return to downtown on Willow Avenue. Just before reaching Main Street, turn right onto Broadway. At the next intersection is:

**4. Red Men's Hall.** The Improved Order of Red Men, Waconeck Tribe 103, was one of many such social clubs. Built in 1898, the first floor held an auditorium and stage while the dining room and lodge quarters were upstairs. The lodge members sponsored many community events and, in parades, were quite a sight, dressed in full Indian regalia.

Turn left onto Bridge Street and return to Main Street. Directly across the street are two more places of interest.

**5. The Cornwall National Bank.** (Currently The Lemon Building). Dating from 1914, its design added a "metropolitan appearance" to Main St. while its interior "bestrode prosperity and inspired confidence."

**6. Highland Engine Company Fire House.** (Currently The Children's Garden). When built in 1905, it trans-

formed Cornwall from a quaint town to a modern community. Note that horse-drawn fire fighting equipment was in use until 1914.

Take Main Street west to the traffic circle, former site of the Bandstand, a hallmark of small town life that has not entirely faded; the Bandstand in the Village Cornwall-on-Hudson still hosts concerts. The "square" is still considered the center of the town, and the Cornwall Garden Club keeps it beautiful year round. The remainder of the short tour is described following the optional places numbered 7 and 8.

For the second optional leg continue west on Quaker Avenue past the hospital to:

**7. Friends Meeting House (H).** Built in 1790, this house of worship has been in continual use ever since. The site of the wedded union of the Sands and Ring families, it reflects the significant role played by Quakers early American -- and Cornwall's -- history.

Cross the street and walk Cedar Lane turning right onto Angola Road. Exercise extreme caution when walking on Angola Road: the shoulder is narrow and cars may be speeding. Where there is no sidewalk, remember to walk on the left side of the road facing oncoming traffic. Shortly you will see a white-washed brick house on the right.

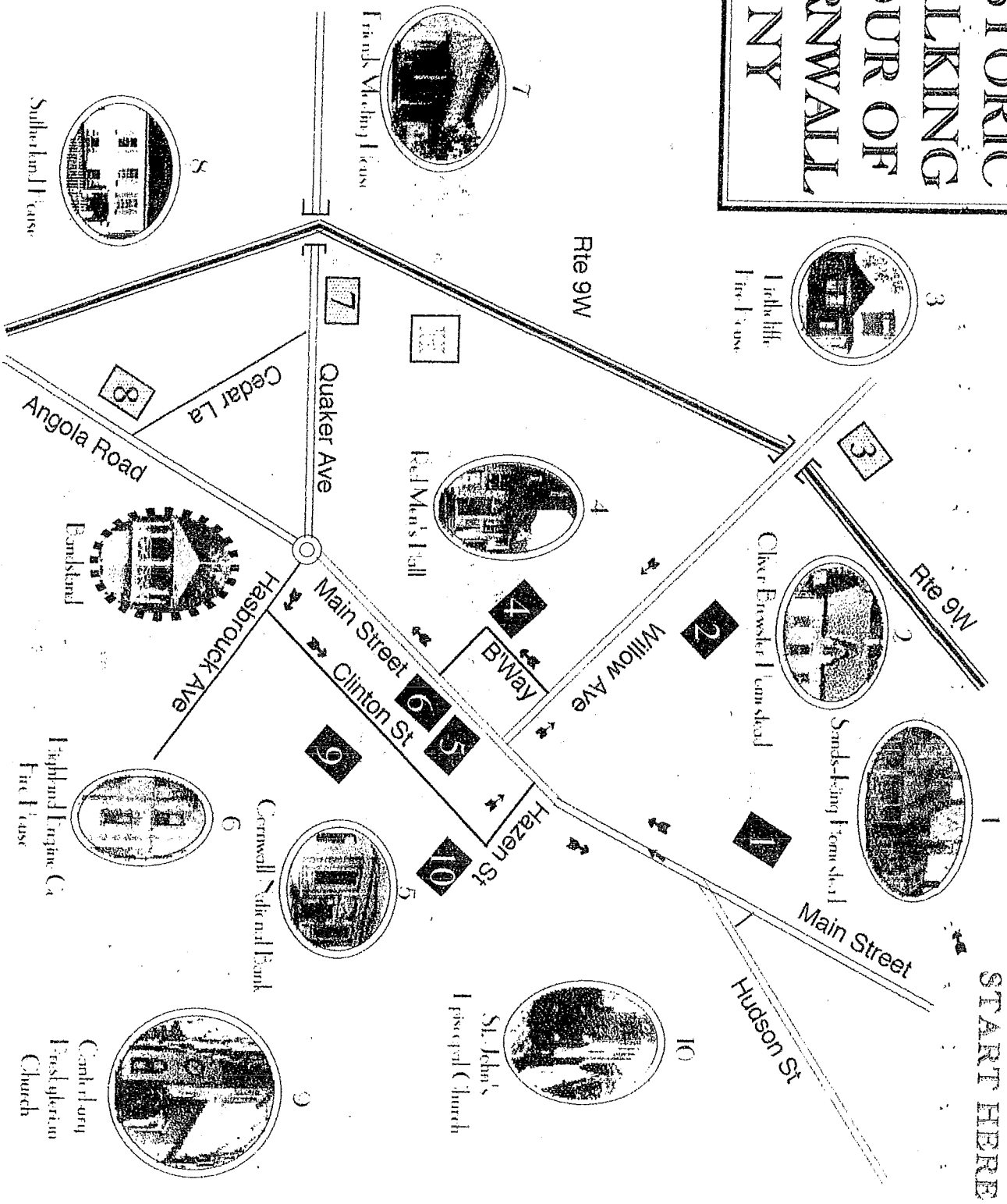
**8. (Optional) Sutherland House (H).** The Sutherland were among the first settlers in Cornwall; their land extended on both sides of Angola Road, then known as Kings Highway. Another pre-Revolutionary War home it was often the setting for town meetings.

Head back to town on Angola Road. Continuation of Basic Historic Tour  
At the traffic circle turn right onto Hasbrouck and then left onto Clinton Street. This street leads us through pleasant residential neighborhood with two churches note:

**9. Cantlerbury Presbyterian Church (H).** Built in 1822 with the brickwork and the addition of the tower completed in 1860, this is the second oldest house of worship in Cornwall.

Further down Clinton is an imposing brick structure **10. St. John's Episcopal Church.** This church was built in 1859 and its tower added 10 years later. It was very chaste example of the early English style. A short jaunt on Hazen leads back to Main Street. Turn right to return to the Sands King Homestead.

# HISTORIC WALKING TOUR OF CORNWALL NY



# Cornwall-on-Hudson Historic Walking Tour

This walking tour of the Village of Cornwall-on-Hudson highlights the community's architectural heritage and introduces some of its past influential citizens. The tour is divided into 2 parts, both beginning at the Bandstand in the Village Square. (PHOTO)

## PART A (3/4 mile)

1. **Storm King Theater.** Across the street from the Bandstand is the graceful Art Deco facade of the Storm King Theater, dating from 1935, with its bold neon sign and distinctive curved entranceway.
2. **Cornwall Savings Bank.** Next to the theater on River Avenue is a brick High Style Victorian building dating from 1887 that once housed a bank, and later the Village offices and police station. (PHOTO)
3. **Taft House.** Continue walking down River Avenue and just past Spruce Street. On the left is the early 19th Century Taft House, the home of Thomas Taft, first "President" of the Village, which was incorporated in 1884.
4. **Clark House.** A little further down River Road is the well-preserved Federal style Clark House. Dating from 1796, it is one of the oldest homes in the Village.
5. **Brick Carriage House.** On your left you will pass a brick building with large garage doors that served as a carriage barn in the 1850's.
6. **Idlewild.** (Not on the tour.) Half a mile ahead of Curie Road is the location of Idlewild, home of the noted 19th century author Nathaniel Parker Willis. The original, designed by eminent architect Calvert Vaux, has been extensively modified and is no longer recognizable. Willis wrote eloquently about life in such a healthful place and contributed to the boom in summer resort hotels and health spas located in Cornwall. (PHOTO)
7. **Matthiessen Park.** To the right with a river view is the former site of the Matthiessen Estate. (PHOTO) In the 1890's, the grounds of this estate became the first housing development in the Village. Turn into Center Street and then left onto Pine Street. Most of the original houses of Matthiessen Park

still remain. Along this short street is a fine collection of Queen Anne style houses, which are characterized by their multi-pitched roofs and friendly porches. Continue on Pine, leaving Matthiessen Park. Turn right on Park and then left onto Idlewild. Just past Prospect Street is the former Village Library building, which was constructed in 1935 and recently converted for school offices.

8. **Idlewild Avenue School.** Across the street from the library is a brick school building notable for its use of circles and arcs in the design of the facade and entranceway, dating from 1896. (PHOTO)
9. **Tompkins House.** Continue on Idlewild and next to the library sits this large clapboard mid-19th century Second Empire style house. Return to the Bandstand.

## PART B (1 1/2 miles)

10. **Barlow & Spenser Sweeney Factory.** Cross Hudson Street to Duncan and the second building past the corner is the site of a famous early 20th century souvenir factory and store specializing in wood turnings and local post cards. (PHOTO)
  11. **Storm King Firehouse.** Return to Hudson Street and continue east past the old Storm King Firehouse, dating from 1903, which is now dwarfed by the 1970's addition. (PHOTO)
  12. **Cornwall-on-Hudson High School.** Across from the firehouse sits a large school building built in 1922. Currently used by the elementary grades, the inscription carved forever in stone still says Cornwall-on-Hudson High School.
  13. **Presbyterian Church.** Originally dating from 1856 and enlarged in 1870, this is the Village's oldest house of worship. (PHOTO)
- Continuing on Hudson, the looming presence of Storm King Mountain remains in the foreground. Rising 1600 feet above sea level at the Hudson River, this was the site of a proposed Consolidated Edison power generating station -- an event that galvanized many individuals and community groups. The ensuing lawsuit helped establish legal precedents for the environmental movement, which proved influential far beyond the Hudson River Valley.
14. **Cocks' Store.** On the right you will see Butterhill Antiques, the site of Cocks' 1870 store, the original was built at Cornwall Landing in 1850. Butter Hill was an early name for Storm King Mountain, although the names seem to be at opposite ends of the spectrum.
  15. **Gillis-Wilson House.** Turn left on Wilson Road and

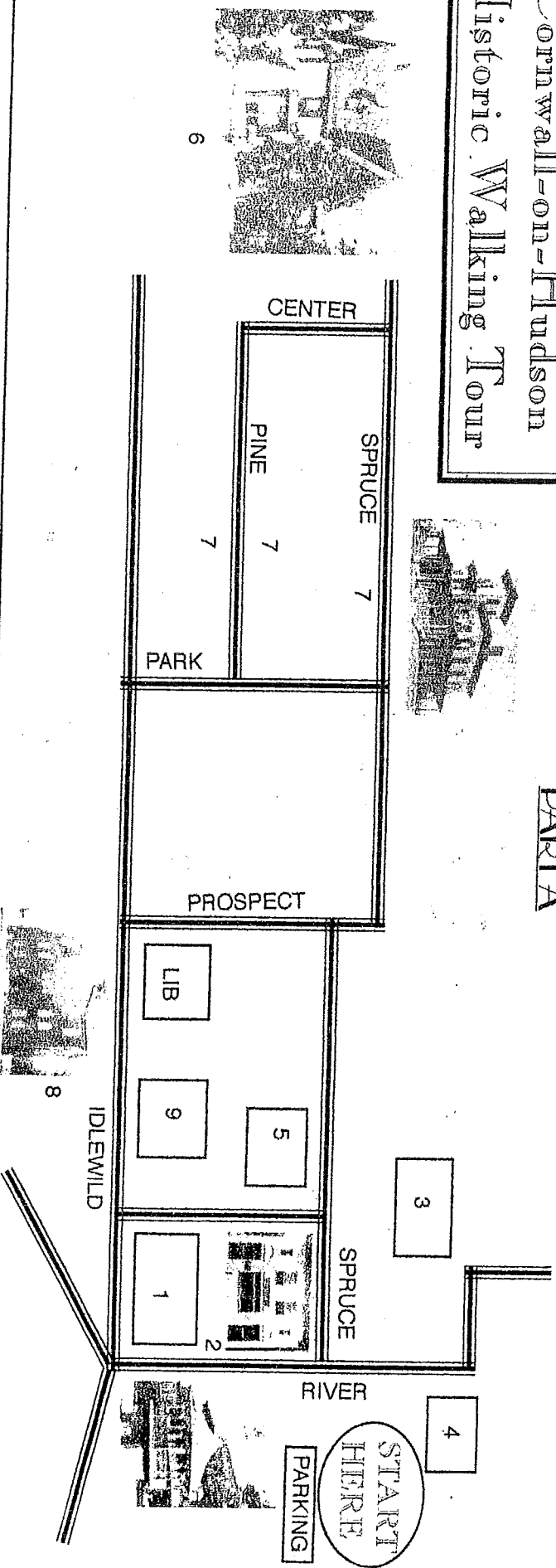
continue to the end. Here is the intact Gillis-Wilson House, a 2-story Federal style brick building built in 1820 on a bluff overlooking the river. It is unusual in that the entire house is only one room deep. Stephen Gillis owned a large brickyard just below this property which used the clay from the banks. Many local structures were built using these bricks. (PHOTO)

Turn right on Grandview, the most aptly named street in the Village. When you reach River Street this neighborhood is known as Cliffside Park - and one look over the edge reveals that it is also well named.

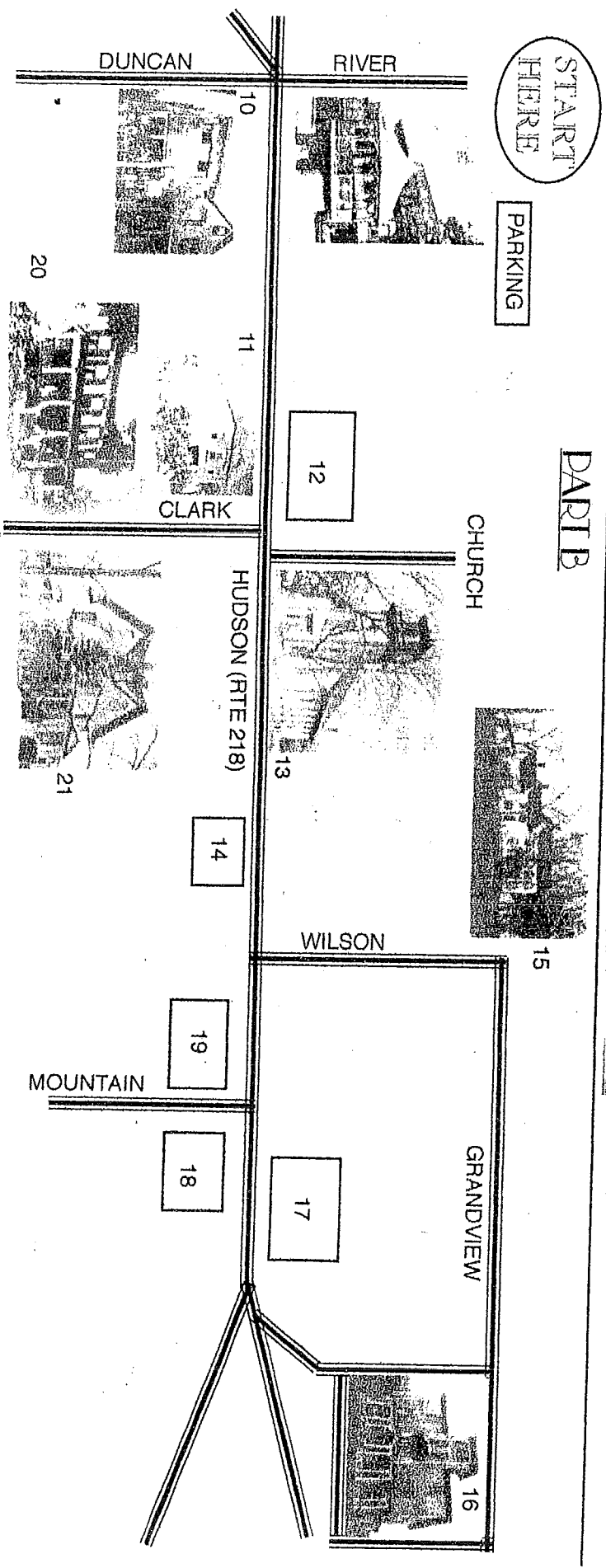
16. **Carson-Palmer Mansion.** After a few blocks, the majestic Carson-Palmer mansion becomes visible uphill on the right. With its distinctive cupola roof and enormous porches, this 1855 Italianate mansion is perched to take in the panoramic view of the Hudson River valley. In 1910, the grounds of this estate became an extensive housing development. Turn right at the corner to view the house and its grounds from another perspective. (PHOTO)
  17. **Turn right again, past the brick carriage barn and then left onto River Street.** Follow this back to Hudson Street.
  18. **Elmer HoldWheeler Sanitarium.** On the right is a large apartment building that was once half of a popular hotel which later served as a sanitarium, literally a place to be healthy. The fresh air, country breezes and smog-free sunshine were known to be more conducive to recovery than the stressful environs of New York City. Cornwall once boasted dozens of such places.
  19. **Maher House.** The large brick house on the corner of Mountain Road dates from the early 19th century, and was renovated circa 1860 with the addition of the mansard roof.
  20. **Presbon House.** Another 19th century brick house, this one with a Dutch Colonial Revival stepped gable. Continue on Hudson to Clark Street and turn left.
  21. **Henry N. Clark House.** Up the hill and to the right sits the 1843 Federal style Clark House with its broad veranda, home to one of the earliest Village families. (PHOTO)
  22. **Dr. Lynnon Abbott's House.** Across the street on the knoll is the 1870 home of one of Cornwall's most distinguished citizens. (PHOTO)
- Return to Hudson Street, turn left to go back to the Bandstand. This concludes the walking tour.

Cornwall-on-Hudson  
Historic Walking Tour

PART A



PART B



# SCENIC / HISTORIC WALKING TOUR OF PLEASANT HILL ROAD CORNWALL, NY

Located in the western part of Cornwall, nestled between Schunemunk Mountain to the west and the Black Rock Forest to the east, Pleasant Hill Road provided a route for mill and farm goods to the Hudson River port city of Newburgh. It linked two small rural communities - Mountainville and West Cornwall - that were transformed in the 1850's by the coming of the Erie Railroad. The two railroad stations are still standing, although they have had their share of name changes.

With the railroad providing easy access for urbanites to the south, area farmers could earn additional income in the summers by taking in boarders. Mountainville became a great destination for city dwellers who savored the fresh country air and striking scenery. Spurred on by Nathaniel Parker Willis' impassioned writings, Cornwall thrived as a restful and healthful place. The NYS Thruway now occupies the route of the Erie Railroad and Pleasant Hill Road's continuity has since been bisected - there is an Old Pleasant Hill Road on the east side of the highway off Orrs Mills Road.

When Orange County took over the road in the early 1960's, becoming County Route 97, long stretches of stone walls and many beautiful trees were eliminated in spite of widespread opposition by residents. In response, the Cornwall Tree and Conservation Committee, forerunner of the current Conservation Advisory Council, was organized by one of these residents, Dolce Dorfman.

This tour is limited to a 1-mile stretch (2-mile roundtrip) and the description that follows reads from north to south. It is intended as a walking tour, but in the future it would make a beautiful leg of a bicycle tour as well. REMEMBER if walking to stay on the LEFT side of the road facing oncoming traffic.

Pleasant Hill Road is the first left turn after the Thruway overpass on Orrs Mills Road going west from Route 32 in Cornwall. The first house on the tour is located just after Lightcap Lane reemerges on the left 0.5 mi from Orrs Mills Road.

## 1. Colonial with Dutch Gambrel roof, 1915.

This house features a foundation made of the field stone typical of the area. (Current owner Sayres)

## 2. Gordon/Townsend House, "The Gables," 1870.

This is a Carpenter Gothic Victorian that was a wedding gift from Elizabeth Townsend's parents. The house is typical of its period with decorative shingles on its many gables, porches, a three-story tower, and an abundance of gingerbread. (Current owner Regan)

## VISTA TO THE EAST

Along this stretch of Pleasant Hill Road a panorama opens up to the east. Across the fields and just beyond the Thruway can be seen some of the imposing works on permanent display at the Storm King Art Center, the largest outdoor sculpture museum in America. Forming the backdrop are the ancient mountains of the Hudson Highlands - the closest is Black Rock and behind it is Storm King. These protected lands ensure an abiding interconnection of the community to the landscape.

## 3. Reconstructed barn

Main out building of the 110-acre farm of Samuel Brooks, Gentleman Farmer (see #4). (Current owner Jones/Arsenaull)

## 4. Samuel Brooks House, 1874.

An eclectic Gothic Revival house that retains many of its original interior features including paneled wood doors with original hardware, wide board flooring, period molding, woodwork and trim, marble and wood fireplace mantels and staircase. In addition, it retains a great deal of exterior integrity in materials and workmanship, and on the property can be seen numerous walnut, cherry and pear trees. (Current owner Lincoln)

## 5. Dutch Colonial House, 1880.

Set among the rolling lawns of this large estate, the house features a majestic oak-lined drive.

## VISTA TO THE WEST

Here the views open to the west, highlighting rugged Schunemunk Mountain. With its many miles of trails, Schunemunk has long been a favorite destination of hikers and in 2000 was designated a New York State Park by Governor Pataki.

## 6. Benjamin VanDuzer House, 1833.

Main house of the 90 acre estate primarily of field stone, "retains all the Federal influenced architectural details." (Current owner Coelho)

## 7. Storm King Lodge.

Former carriage house of the VanDuzer estate, now a Bed and Breakfast establishment. (Current owner Janks)

## 8. Pleasant Hill Cemetery.

This is one of the oldest cemeteries in the area, with tombstones dating from the early 1700's. Many of the headstones depict specialized funeral art styles typical of the period.

## 9. Perkins House, late 1800s.

This is a magnificent white Georgian Revival house with ionic columns and classical pediments. It once belonged to a relative of the noted banker J.P. Morgan who is known to have visited the home. (Current owner Mandell)

## VISTAS EAST AND WEST

Continue south on Pleasant Hill Road, and just before crossing the NYS Thruway, views open up first to the west and then eastward. Here is another opportunity to sense the quiet majesty of Schunemunk Mountain, the fertile Moodna valley, and the verdant hills of the Black Rock Forest.

## 10. Wilford Wood House, "Windy Ridge," ca. 1890.

This colonial revival house was used as a summer retreat for Wood, a coal dealer from Brooklyn. It served as a retirement farm for his hard-working horses. (Current owner Stanley)

ORRIS MILLS RD

**SCENIC / HISTORIC  
WALKING TOUR OF  
PLEASANT HILL ROAD  
CORNWALL, NY**

QUAKER  
AVE

PLEASANT HILL RD  
LIGHT RAIL

STORM  
KING  
ART  
CENTER

RTE 32

NY STATE THRUWAY

BLACK ROCK FOREST

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VISTA

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⑧

VISTA

⑨

VISTA

⑩

SCHUWEMUNK  
MOUNTAIN

