



### A History of New Paltz Hamlet

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The history of New Paltz has been examined by countless historians, from Ralph Lefevre in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to scholars studying at SUNY New Paltz today. Stores of old documents and records, relating to the establishment of New Paltz by the Duzine and expansion under their descendants and other migrants are available at the Huguenot Historic Society Library on Huguenot Street, Haviland-Heidgerd Archives at the Elting Memorial Library and Sojourner Truth Library at SUNY New Paltz. To summarize the extensive history of this vibrant and well established community in a few short paragraphs is impossible. However, there are several essential themes that help place the Hamlet of New Paltz in a historic context.

Annual flooding of the Walkkill River led to the creation of fertile soil along its banks that could be used for farming and planting crops. As the location of New Paltz Hamlet sits on a floodplain of the Walkkill River, this area was considered valuable for agricultural development.

Although evidence of Native American peoples in the area of New Paltz Hamlet points to activity of archaic, non-sedentary groups as early as 10,580 B.C.E., it was between the years 1000 and 1600 C.E. that the first Indigenous peoples began using the land for horticultural activities [\[1\]](#). Developments in agricultural yield by these early native groups led to an increasing sedentary lifestyle, which encouraged the construction of sizeable villages enclosed by palisade walls. These fortified communities were a necessity as inter-tribal warfare over cropland was fought throughout the region. A wealth of evidence on this period has been found near the New Paltz Rural Cemetery and within the area of Huguenot Street [1](#). Two of the most prominent of these groups were the Esopus and Minisink peoples of the Lenni Lenape or Delaware Nation. These groups played a crucial role in European settlement in the region during the 17<sup>th</sup> century [\[2\]](#)

Between 1655 and 1664, a series of conflicts, known as the “Esopus Wars” erupted throughout the Hudson Valley, predominantly in Ulster County, then part of the Dutch colony of “New Netherland”. The encroachment of Europeans onto farmland which had traditionally belonged to the Esopus peoples resulted in raids against European settlements in an attempt to drive the intruders out of the area. Simultaneously, fear of a universal Indian uprising in New Netherland generated a sense of anxiety among European colonists, who led pre-emptive strikes against native villages. These wars were characterized by the taking of prisoners, small skirmishes and the destruction of both Native American and European crops and settlements. The Huguenots, who fled religious persecution in Europe and settled in the Hudson Valley, had their settlement of Nieuwe Dorp (Hurley) burned to the ground during the Second Esopus War in 1663. By 1664, peace was returned to the region with the takeover of the colony of New Netherland by the English, who re-named it “New York”. Although several European settlers lived in the vicinity of New Paltz un-officially prior to 1677, it was during this year that 12 prominent Huguenot settlers (known as the Duzine) from Hurley, signed a treaty with the Esopus Indians for an extensive tract of land that included 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of present-day New Paltz. In return, the Esopus received goods such as nails, iron kettles, axes guns and wampum among other European items

2. The Huguenot settlement was established in the present day Village of New Paltz (on Huguenot Street), which lies on the eastern banks of the Walkill River. The community was governed by the Duzine, a kind of corporation. That form of government continued well past the time of the American Revolution, by special action of the New York State legislature. These Huguenot settlers, and their descendants, would found many of the hamlets that would comprise New Paltz Town. In 1887, the Village of New Paltz was incorporated within the Town of New Paltz.

Official settlement of New Paltz by Europeans began in 1678 with the arrival of Huguenot Families from Hurley, NY. The area was given the name “New Paltz” after the “Pfalz” region of the German Palatinate which the families came from [3] after fleeing religious persecution in France. Archaeological evidence suggests that the first homes constructed on Huguenot Street are believed to be temporary pit houses, built to accommodate the families whilst the present day stone houses were being constructed. The earliest home to survive from this period is the “DuBois Fort”, built around 1705.

Over the course of the next century, the Hamlet of New Paltz’s industry grew to include sawmills, gristmills, physicians, harness makers, taverns, wagon makers, blacksmiths and other cottage industries common in many villages and hamlets from the early 18<sup>th</sup> to the dawning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Public institutions were created shortly after the establishment of New Paltz. In August 1689, the Patentees deeded a lot and cottage to Jean Cottin, a school master. By 1717 a stone church was constructed on Huguenot Street to accommodate for religious services as well as

education, as Cottin's lot bordered the church property [\[4\]](#) . In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the introduction of the public school system in New Paltz led to the creation of the first public school in New Paltz in 1812, on 15 North Front Street. The school was constructed from the quarried stone of the early 18

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century church, torn down in 1773. In 1828 the second story of the school at 15 North Front Street became a school for the teaching of Classical literature (the predecessor of the New Paltz Academy and SUNY New Paltz). The top floor of the building later became a meeting lodge for the infamous anti-immigration organization the "Know Nothing Party" from 1853-1855. Religious services continued at the new Reformed Church on Huguenot Street, built in 1838. One of the first teachers of the New Paltz Public School was Dr. John Bogardus, whose c. 1812 home resides at 275 Main Street in what used to be known as the community of Put Corners.

By 1833, "The New Paltz Academy" was built in the vicinity of Huguenot Street near what is now the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail. The school was established to teach classical studies (which had been taught at the public school). By the 1870s the Wallkill Valley Railroad ran near the academy and allowed for students from nearby communities to attend classes regularly [\[5\]](#) . In addition to teaching Classical studies, it also taught two and three year teaching programs for elementary and secondary education. The Academy also taught high school classes. After two fires (one in February of 1884 and another in the spring of 1906), the Academy, or Normal School, was destroyed. However, thanks to the quick thinking of Principal Myron Scudder, classes continued in several buildings within the village. By May of 1907, ground was broken for a new Normal School, "Old Main"

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Although schools, churches and public organizations helped nurture the well being of the community of New Paltz Hamlet, the same level of treatment was not offered to the many slaves and free Blacks who lived in the village from its inception up to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century [\[7\]](#) . Despite its lack of a long growing season, slaves were used in the Hudson Valley, and particularly New Paltz, to aid in the cultivation of fields as well working in gristmills, saw mills, domestic service and other activities which maintained the lifestyles of landowners like the Huguenots

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. Therefore it is not surprising that many of the founding families of New Paltz by the end of the 17

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century were slave owners. For example, records from the 1680s and 1690s note that the Deyo family was involved in the purchasing and selling of enslaved Africans, and the 1703 census of New Paltz states that seven African adults and two children were living in the village

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. Other information on slaves living in the Hamlet during this early period can be found in family wills, inventories and legal records

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. According to the 1790 U.S. Census, slaves made up 13.1 percent of the population of New Paltz

5. Many of these slaves lived in below adequate to poor conditions, either in the attic or basement of their owners or in slave quarters on the surrounding property

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. Up until the 1860s, slaves and free blacks were buried in a separate cemetery north of Huguenot Street proper, known as the "African Burial Ground".

Despite the passing of an act of emancipation through gradual manumission by the state of New York in 1799, it was not until 1827 that most blacks in New York State were "free". However, they were still treated as second class citizens. For example, blacks were buried in segregated plots in the New Paltz Rural cemetery shortly after the end of the American Civil War. Also, census records from the 1850s and 1860s list many blacks either working as laborers or servants. Still, others were able to make livelihoods for themselves as independent shop owners, farmers and businessmen throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With the passing of the 15<sup>th</sup>

amendment in 1870, the

*New Paltz Independent*

recorded that "Those [African Americans] in this part of the country are taking matters very coolly but although their joy is of a queer kind, they no doubt rejoice as much as the others-making melody in their hearts"

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. Six years later, an organization of 30 black voters was formed by Jacob Wynkoop which "cast solidly for the Republican ticket"

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. Wynkoop was also one of the original trustees of the African Methodist Episcopal Church on Pencil Hill in 1871, his brother was in charge of the construction of the parsonage

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. By the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century, famed boxer Floyd Patterson took up residence in the Hamlet of Springtown. On the 12<sup>th</sup>

of May 1972, he held a charity boxing exhibition in the Elting Gym to raise money for a young

boy who was suffering from cancer. Over 3,000 spectators attended the boxing match

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. African Americans have played a vital role in the Hamlet of New Paltz as professors at the college, community leaders and business owners.

The tourist industry has remained a constant for this community from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. Outdoor past times, the close proximity to the Mohonk Mountain House and the pristine nature of the surrounding area made the Hamlet of New Paltz a prime travel destination. Numerous horse races on the Walkkill flats drew many wealthy gamblers and entrepreneurs, such as the Astors, Goulds, Morgans and Vanderbilts, who stayed at such places as the hotel on Main Street (known as the Palmer House in 1920). Riverside Cottage and the “Blue Haven Casino” were both established along the banks of the Walkkill and the resort soon grew to include summer houses, a soft drink building and candy factory

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By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, New Paltz Town and Hamlet underwent more changes to meet the influx of immigration and automobile travel. The early 1900’s saw many Italian immigrants moving into the area known as “Put Corners” and Ohioville. By 1964, the Congregation of Ahavath Achim was created after several Jewish families bought the property at 8 Church Street. It has since been known as Hehilat Ahavath Achim, “congregation of brotherly love”

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. As the century wore on, other ethnic groups soon followed, with the help in changes in transportation. The Walkkill Valley Railroad played a major role in the transport of people and goods from the 1870s to 1978. Inter-town transportation was facilitated by the New Paltz and Highland Trolley, which provided regular service through the village from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century to 1925. Automobiles arrived in the village around 1900 and the first garage in New Paltz, and one of the first in the Hudson Valley, was established by George Johnston in 1903 on South Chestnut Street. Begun as a radiator and repair shop, Johnston later expanded it to a garage with the ability to hold 60 cars

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. Automobile travel and industry in the Hudson Valley by the 1950’s also led to the removal or re-modeling of some of New Paltz Hamlet’s historic buildings to meet new demands for convenience shopping and job opportunities. The construction of the New York State Thruway also hastened the demise of a significant portion of Put Corners, while at the same time generating new jobs at several of the corporate plants that were established there, such as Freihofer’s and Frito-Lay.

One of the most dramatic changes to occur in New Paltz Hamlet came in the early 1960’s

with the construction of SUNY New Paltz Campus. Although the Normal School was established at “Old Main” in 1907, with an extension built in 1934 (Van den berg Hall), the creation of New Paltz as a SUNY school meant that dormitories, a new gymnasium and library, dining and performance halls would be added to the pre-existing school. Like the thruway, the construction of SUNY resulted in the removal or destruction of many other old buildings (including the college riding stable which used to stand where the Elting Gym parking lot now is). SUNY New Paltz has since become a center of entertainment, education and social activities in the town and has educated thousands of students since its inception in the 1960s.

The Hamlet of New Paltz can be considered the nucleus of the hamlets that surround it, all of which have either been founded or settled by the descendants of the original Patentees of 1677. For example Moses Freer, who was born in the Freer house on Huguenot Street, established several businesses in Ohioville and became a patriarch of that community in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Christian Deyo was one of the first settlers of the hamlet of Springtown in 1728. Property owner Elias Ean, who married the daughter of Patentee Antoine Crispell not only helped build the first church in the Hamlet of New Paltz but also inherited the majority of his father-in-law’s property in what would become known as the hamlet of Middletown. These familial connections between the Patentees and their descendants ensured a strong bond between the Hamlet of New Paltz and its outlying communities.

However the village was not an isolated community on the western side of the Hudson River either. Citizens of New Paltz Hamlet served in every major American conflict from the American Revolutionary War to the present day. During the First World War, National Guard soldiers paraded along Church Street when they weren’t guarding the Catskill Aqueduct in Springtown from possible German poison attack. In the 1960s, students at the college staged protests against the escalation of the war in Vietnam. The outside world affected the Hamlet of New Paltz, just as much as the Hamlet of New Paltz contributed to the economic growth of the Hudson Valley.

Despite social and physical change in the village, its history is well entrenched. The iron bridge along Route 299 east replaced an earlier wooden bridge built in 1845, near the location where the river was forded many years before. The creation of the “Huguenot Patriotic, Historical and Monumental Society” in 1894, by descendants of the original 12 patentees, secured Huguenot Street’s place in the annals of American history as one of the oldest communities in the United States. Costumed pageants commemorating the founding of New Paltz, lectures given by historians and heritage festivals also continue to evoke the early history of this settlement, richly steeped in the past but continually looking forward. By putting this village and the communities that surround it in their historic contexts, we can see how its inhabitants adjusted to new cultural and physical changes over time while maintaining a strong sense of identity and history.

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[1] Hauptman, Laurence M. *The Native Americans: A History of New Paltz and Environs*. 1975. 2-3. Print.

[2] Hauptman, p. 7-10

[3] Hasbrouck, p. 8

[4] Carlo, Paula Wheeler. *Huguenot Refugees in Colonial New York*. 1st. Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2005. 103-104. Print.

[5] Johnson, Carol A., Ryan, Marion W. *Images of America: New Paltz, Charleston, SC*: Arcadia Publishing, 2001. 38. Print

[6] Johnson, C.A./ Ryan, M.W. p. 42

[7] Carlo, p. 157

[8] Williams-Myers, A.J. *Long Hammering: Essays on the Forging of an African American Presence in the Hudson River Valley to the Early Twentieth Century*. 1st. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press Inc, 1994. 3. Print.

[9] Williams-Myers, p. 61

[10] Carlo, p. 154

[11] Heidgard, William. *Black History of New Paltz*. 2nd. 1992. 5. Print.

[12] Carlo, p. 155

[13] Williams-Myers p. 49

[14] Carlo, p. 159

[15] *New Paltz Independent* 14 Apr 1870, Print.

[16] *New Paltz Independent* 12 Oct 1876, Print.

[17] *New Paltz Independent* 15 Feb 1907, Print.

[18] Johnson, C.A./Ryan, M.W. P. 20

[19] Johnson, C.A./ Ryan, M.W. p. 34

[20] Johnson, C.A./ Ryan, M.W. p. 64-65

[\[21\]](#) Johnson, C.A./ Ryan, M.W. p. 108

[\[22\]](#) Johnson, C.A./ Ryan, M.W. p. 72