

The Story Of Continental Village

BY

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Past Peekskill City Historian

The Revolutionary monument standing by the roadside in Continental Village was unveiled and dedicated on October 9, 1921. I remember the afternoon of that day, being present in a large concourse of people. There were ceremonies, pageantry, and an address by Dr. James Sullivan, Historian of the State of New York.

I trust that it may be given me to write that my birthplace—the home of my grandfather—William J. Briggs—lay southward of the monument only several hundred feet by the roadside in the fields. I came not as a stranger on October 9, 1921. In the distant time of my childhood there were only several large farms in the Canopus Valley. They were farms of vast acreage—the Briggs farm of my grandfather consisted of nearly 200 acres.

This present story, however, must be swift even as the flight of swallows in the Valley of long ago. Near the monument by the roadside stands today the 52nd milestone from New York. The road itself, is the oldest highway authorized by the British Crown in the pioneer Province of New York. It was approved in the reign of Queen Anne in the Year 1703. In that time the wilderness road came to be cut southward from Albany, reaching the Peekskill region in 1723. The regional order of construction is dated: "Ye sixteenth and twenty-six day of September, Anno Domini, 1723". At first the road was called "Queen Anne's Highway". In later decades it came to be designated "The Kings Highway", and is so described in an ancient document about which I should like to write briefly. I came upon the ancient paper in research for the City of Peekskill a number of years ago. The document, dated June 1, 1753, described the regional "Kings Highway" in lands of the pioneers of that time. The aged paper of more than 200 years was written with goose-quill pen on rag-pulp paper now yellow with the years. The document rests today in the archives of the City of Peekskill, City Hall. There is none other like it.

In the 1750 decade the "Kings Highway" came to be widened and improved. Mainly, it came in the year 1754, when the British army of Lord Loudon marched northward on this road to the distant French and Indian wars near Lake George and Lake Champlain.

A number of decades later—in 1786—the “King’s Highway” became the New York-Albany Post Road when John Kenny and Issac Van Dyck received from the State Legislature exclusive rights to “erect and set up” a weekly stagecoach line—the stages to be drawn by four horses with regional stops for rest.

Before this, however, and during the Revolution the highway came to be much travelled by soldiers of the Continental armies and great leaders of the Revolution. On the road came illustrious leaders, Washington, Franklin, Hamilton, John Jay, and a host of others even as a roster of the times and names which are forever sealed in American history. There is, one thinks, no other road like this road in all of the United States bearing memories like a lambent flame—not as a rendezvous with death, or the calendars and clocks of time but, rather with a living dimension of the eternal time and of God, the Creator, the same yesterday and today and forever.

Comes now our story directly on the road to Continental Village. Before the Revolution the tiny community was called “Robinson’s Bridge”—taking the name from a crude, wooden bridge over the swift brook near the “1732” house. In that time prior to the Revolution, Colonel Beverly Robinson owned some 60,000 acres in the wild river terrain which came to be called “Philipstown”. Colonel Beverly Robinson was a Tory and commander of the British loyalists. As a sequel to the stark and bloody story of conflict he lost and his lands were confiscated by Act of the State Legislature—an Act of forfeiture of 1783. Robinson left forever his beautiful valley and it came to be that in times after the Revolution tenant farmers of the 60,000 acres were no more in liege to the King and patriot soldiers of the Continental Line or their descendants became purchasers and freeholders of the virgin land. History indicates that Colonel Beverly Robinson was a good man, a God fearing man, generous and kind to his tenants. He lost in reality to a lost cause. Among the patriot descendants who came to settle in the Canopus Valley after the Revolution were my direct ancestors, Edgar Briggs and John Croft. Their farms were vast and comprised hundreds of acres by the brook of the willows.

Turning, again, on the road to Continental Village it is recorded that during the Revolution it was named “the gorge in the mountains” by some records. By the “gorge” a hillside redoubt was built and the vestiges are visible to this day. It lies northward of the monument a short distance on the winding hill road. Washington came to this scene in November of 1777 and again on June 26, 1781. At other times

he travelled the road to Continental Headquarters in the "Beverly" house by the river at Garrison.

On October 9, 1777, the Continental Village—Storehouses, arsenals, loaded wagons, the mill—was burned, sacked and destroyed by a large British raiding force under General Tryon—landing from sloops on the river. The Village was empty in that time and soldiers of the Continental Line had long marched away to distant battlefields and in their marching often left the mark of blood in the snow.

The first Continentals to be quartered in the Village were three Connecticut Regiments of General Parson's Brigade, namely—Prescott's, Ward's and Wylly's—also the First New York Brigade commanded by General Morin Scott. In Scott's Brigade were four regiments, namely—Drake's, Lasher's, Malcolm's and Hardenbergh's. In this latter regiment was an artillery company commanded by Captain Alexander Hamilton, then a youth of 18 years.

In Peekskill, General Heath was in command and it was he who, it has been indicated, ordered the construction of barracks to shelter 1500 men and, thereafter named the village "Continental Village". The barracks were crude structures even as the "Hempstead Huts" to the north several miles. Sickness took a toll and hunger often stalked the land.

One hundred and forty-four years had passed from the burning of the village on October 9, 1777, until the afternoon of October 9, 1921, when the monument came to be unveiled and dedicated in memory of the Mothers of the Revolution. On the afternoon of dedication Dr. James Sullivan, Historian of the State of New York, spoke in part (an excerpt) as follows:

"...In this nestling valley—into this land of God, we have come this day to pay our humble tribute to Mothers of the Revolution....In all this broad land there is no such monument as this..."

My friends of Continental Village of today have given me to write this story—to remember again the beautiful valley, brook of the willows, pastures and meadow lands, rabbit runs and swimming "hole" by the ash tree where ran the brook—sand floored like a crystal stream—to recall the wooden fishing bridge by the great Sycamore tree. The Valley of childhood lives on in memory like the lonely evening song of a whip-poor-will from the dark hill.....

Continental Village is rich in historic significance dating back to prerevolutionary times. It is frequently referred to in recounting this very critical time in America's history, being mentioned primarily, as a quartering and storage area, yet it was the scene of several battles during the Revolutionary War. It was originally known as Continentalville, however, the name of the area was changed to Continental Village approximately fifty years prior to the American Revolution.

The specific area which is now Continental Village, comprising 2000 acres, was originally a portion of some 87,000 acres which was purchased by Stephanus Van Cortlandt from the Indians and was owned by Colonel Pierce Van Cortlandt during the Revolution. Colonel Van Cortlandt, a great grandson of Stephanus, was a friend and confidant of General George Washington.

In 1886 the property was purchased by Stuyvesant Fish, Sr., who served as a Congressman from New York during the period around the turn of the century. The property remained in the Fish family until the 2000 acres was purchased by Norman K. Winston—Arnold Holzer Associates in September of 1946, for the purpose of developing the area into a residential community.

To perpetuate the relationship between the area and the Revolution the streets in the Village were named after military leaders who fought in the area during the War. Also, Gallows Hill Road derived its name from the historic fact that on the crest of the hill several British spies were executed.

For a period of time prior to the Winston-Holzer purchase the massive buildings around the Village Green served as a model dairy and later as the Cinnabar Dude Ranch which leased the buildings from Stuyvesant Fish, Jr. in 1940.

As the area began to be developed under the direction of Continental Village, Inc., it became apparent that there was a necessity for an organization which would address itself to the many needs and problems of this rapidly growing area. Therefore, in 1948, the Continental Village Property Owners Association was formed and incorporated. From its inception the Association has been a voice of the residents striving toward the goal of making Continental Village a better place to live.

Perhaps a chronology of some of the significant milestones of the activities of the Association would best depict its contribution to the residents of the Village.

June, 1949—Contacted Continental Village, Inc. to discuss the condition of the roads, the problems of the lake and the establishment of bus service to and from the area.

July, 1949—Organized a committee to visit the Mohegan Fire District to study the problem of fire protection. Received permission from Continental Village, Inc., to form a patrol to police the village.

April, 1950—Purchased a fire truck and other necessary apparatus and land was donated by Continental Village, Inc., for a fire house.

July, 1950—Began formal arrangements to form a Volunteer Fire Department.

September, 1950—Succeeded in the incorporation of the Continental Village Volunteer Fire Department.

October, 1950—Reached an agreement with the Department of Interior to stock the lake.

December, 1950—Retained a law firm to deal with Continental Village, Inc. regarding the water supply lines, the pumping station and other facets of the water system at the same time to have Continental Village, Inc. complete all roads to bring them up to Township standards.

September, 1951—Purchased a jeep to be used by the police and the fire department.

July, 1953—Succeeded in having Village resident appointed as Town Constable to patrol the Village.

June, 1954—Succeeded in having an election district formed in Continental Village.

February, 1955—Instrumental in the decision of the Town of Philipstown to assume control of the water district.

November, 1957—Succeeded in gaining approval for a Fire Protection District.

January, 1959—Arranged for regular garbage collection.

July, 1960—Fenced in the beach as a safety precaution.

June, 1961—Made various improvements on the beach site and purchased equipment.

July, 1961—Instrumental in having stop signs erected in the Village.

April, 1962—Began studying the possibility of a Park District versus an Improvement District.

July, 1962—Continued responsibility for the maintenance of the beach and equipment.

July, 1963—Retained legal counsel to begin plans for the formation of the Park District.

April, 1964—Succeeded in preventing the erection of overhead transmission lines through the Village as planned by Con Edison.

February, 1966—Succeeded in preventing the building of an asphalt plant on Sprout Brook Road at the site of the Peekskill Mason Supply.

June, 1966—Retained counsel to form the Park District.

July, 1966—Prepared and distributed the booklet "The Park District Story".

August, 1969—Succeeded in having a 30 M.P.H. speed limit established in the Village.

January, 1971—Instrumental in the formation of the Continental Village Park District.

March, 1972—Instrumental in the decision of the Town Board of Philipstown to establish a Dog Control Law.

December, 1979—Enumeration of houses in Philipstown and Putnam Valley sections of Continental Village was completed.

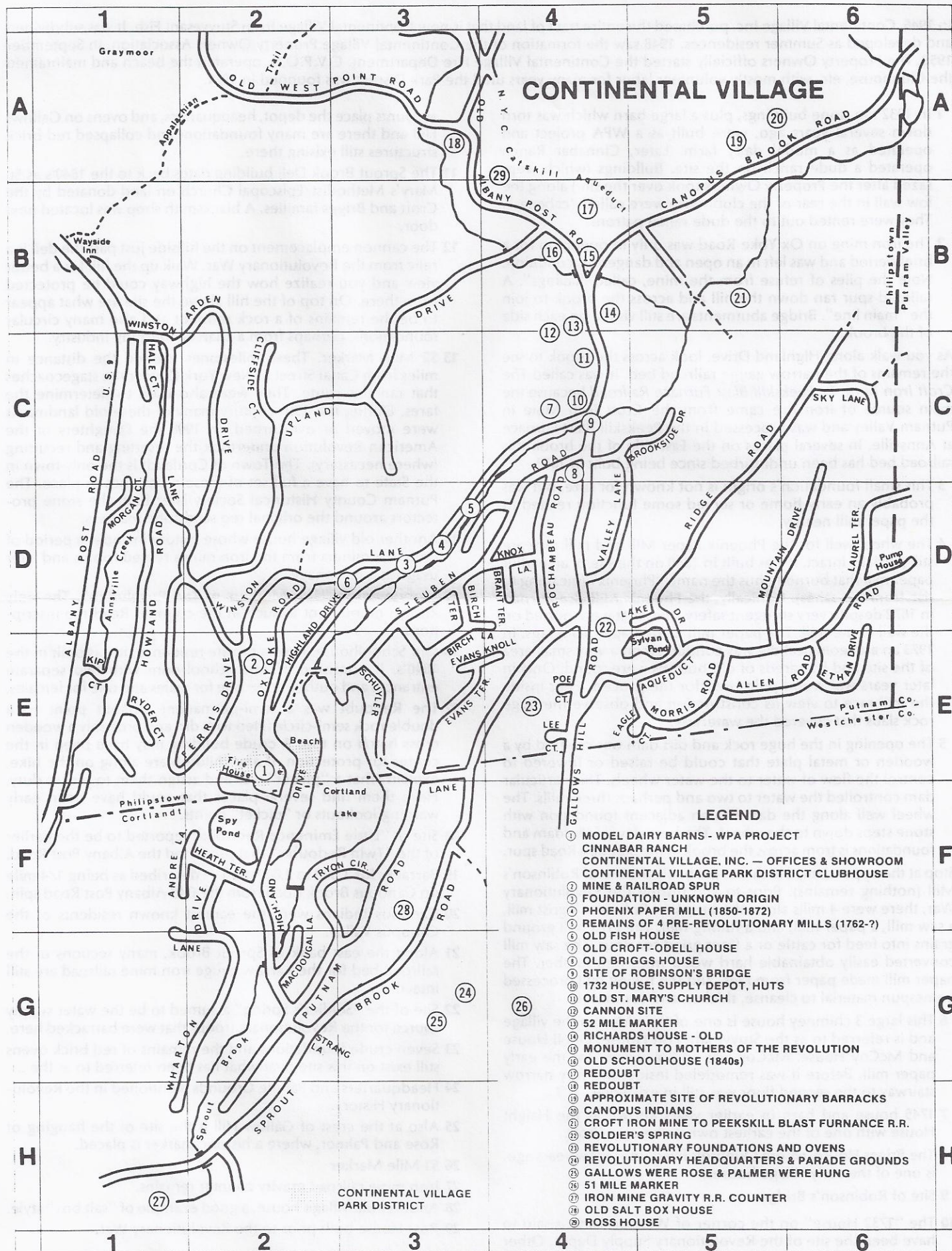
From the above, which certainly does not exhaust all that has been done through and by the Association, it is apparent that invaluable contributions have been made in behalf of every resident of the Village. As improvements are made the value of each resident's property increases, therefore, we all have much to gain by actively supporting and participating in the activities of the Association. For many years a substantial portion of the efforts of the Association were devoted to the maintenance and activity centering around the beach, however, with the formation of the Park District this single-focus concern has been minimized, yet it would be incorrect to presume that the effectiveness, value and necessity of the Property Owners Association has been diminished. Quite the contrary. There is still much to be done and it is only as a collective and united block that we will continue to witness improvements in our community.

As we look ahead to the future we must continue to exert the necessary influence on the Town Boards to keep them sensitive and aware of the needs and problems of the Village, therefore, members of the Association must regularly attend the respective Town Board meetings. There must be continued effort leading to—

- *the improvement of the condition of the roads*
- *the development of recreational programs of the respective Towns incorporating the youth of the Village*
- *the improvement and upgrading of the Water District as the area continues to grow*
- *close contact with the Park District, addressing itself to the year round needs of the community and the effective use and maintenance of the encompassing properties*
- *the development of adequate police protection as the density of population becomes greater*
- *the continuation and maintenance of adequate fire protection*

Needless to say the above does not address all the areas of need and no doubt each resident could add to it, yet these are some of the concerns of the Association and as a civic organization concerned about its community it must continue to strive to truly make Continental Village a good place to live. Let us all join together to this end.

GUIDE TO HISTORICAL SITES IN CONTINENTAL VILLAGE



SELF GUIDED TOUR OF HISTORIC CONTINENTAL VILLAGE

by Ginny Gilbert, March 1992

In 1946, Continental Village Inc. purchased the entire tract of land that is now Continental Village from Stuyvesant Fish. It was subdivided and developed as Summer residences. 1948 saw the formation of the Continental Village Property Owners Association. In September 1950, The Property Owners officially started the Continental Village Fire Department. C.V.P.O.A. operated the beach and maintained the Clubhouse, etc. with mostly volunteer labor for many years until the Park District was founded in 1971.

1 In 1932 the stone buildings, plus a large barn which was torn down several years ago, were built as a WPA project and operated as a model dairy farm. Later, Cinnabar Ranch operated a dude ranch on the site. Buildings (which were razed after the Property Owners took over the site) along the low wall in the rear of the clubhouse were called "cabanas". They were rented out to the dude ranch patrons.

2 The iron mine on Ox Yoke Road was only in operation for a brief period and was left in an open and dangerous condition. Note the piles of refuse from the mine, called "tailings". A railroad spur ran down the hill and across the brook to join the "main line". Bridge abutments are still visible on each side of the brook.

As you walk along Highland Drive, look across the brook to see the remains of the narrow gauge railroad bed. It was called *The Croft Iron Mine To Peekskill Blast Furnace Railroad* because the main source of iron ore came from the Croft Iron Mine in Putnam Valley and was processed in the Peekskill Blast Furnace at Annsville. In several places on the East side of the brook this railroad bed has been undisturbed since being built in 1853.

3 This small foundation's origin is not known for sure, but was probably an early home or served some function related to the paper mill nearby.

4 The wheel well for the Phoenix Paper Mill and mill race are still partially intact. It was built in 1850 on the site of an earlier paper mill that burned, thus the name "Phoenix" (meaning to rise from the ashes). Ironically, the Phoenix Mill also burned in 1872 despite very stringent safety rules that were posted on the wall in the mill. The paper mill made paper from rags. In 1973 an archeological dig was conducted on a very small area of the site and hundreds of old buttons were found. Only in later years was wood pulp used for the process. Peer inside the mill race to view its construction and observe the huge rock slabs that covered the waterway.

5 The opening in the huge rock and dirt dam was covered by a wooden or metal plate that could be raised or lowered to control the flow of water to the water wheels. This particular dam controlled the water to two and perhaps three mills. The wheel well along the dam has an adjacent foundation with stone steps down to the wheel. The best view of the dam and foundations is from across the brook at the Steuben Road spur.

Stop at the upper dam, which was probably the site of Robinson's Mill (nothing remains). Prior to and during the Revolutionary War, there were 4 mills along the brook — Robinson's grist mill, a saw mill, a paper mill, and a fulling mill. The grist mill ground grains into feed for cattle or a finer grind for flour. The saw mill converted easily obtainable hard wood trees into lumber. The paper mill made paper from rags, and the fulling mill processed homespun material to cleanse, thicken and compact it.

6 This large 3 chimney house is one of the oldest in the village and is referred to as the Stuyvesant Fish House, Odell House and McCoy House. McCoy was an "overseer" for the early paper mill. Before it was remodeled inside, the very narrow stairway to the second floor was still in existence.

7 1745 house and barn in earlier years known as the Haight House with one of the earliest owners being a Croft.

8 The Briggs House, where Quensels lived until a few years ago, is one of the early village houses.

9 Site of Robinson's Bridge.

10 The "1732 House" on the corner of Winston Lane is said to have been the site of the Revolutionary Supply Depot. Other

accounts place the depot, headquarters, and ovens on Gallows Hill and there are many foundations and collapsed red brick structures still existing there.

11 The Sprout Brook Deli building dates back to the 1840's as St. Mary's Methodist/Episcopal Church on land donated by the Croft and Briggs families. A blacksmith shop was located next door.

12 The cannon emplacement on the hillside just past the deli is a relic from the Revolutionary War. Walk up the hill for a better view and you realize how the highway could be protected from there. On top of the hill above the site are what appear to be the remains of a rock redoubt and also many circular foundations, perhaps from a charcoal burning industry.

13 52 Mile Marker. These milestones marked the distance in miles from Canal Street in New York City for the stagecoaches that ran this route. They were also used to determine the fares. During the 19th century many of these old landmarks were moved or overturned. In 1908 the Daughters of the American Revolution undertook the resetting and recutting (where necessary). The Town of Cortlandt is the only town in the State to have a full set of these milestones in place. The Putnam County Historical Society later built the stone protectors around the original red sandstone markers.

14 Another old village house whose history includes a period of time that miners from the iron mines rented rooms and later usage as a parsonage.

15 Monument to "The Mothers of The Revolution". The only known monument as such in the country. Read the inscriptions.

16 Old Schoolhouse. Now a private residence, it was built in the 1840's. It consisted of one schoolroom with two separate entrances and outhouses — one for males and one for females.

17 The Redoubt was a semi-permanent lookout point — a double rock semi-circle filled with dirt and probably a wooden cross hatch on top. A crude building may have been in the center for protection. If any children are along on the hike, explain what a "picket" was and assign them to picket duty. Have them find several places that could have been early warning lookouts or "picket" points.

18 Site of "Little Eminence Redoubt" reported to be the earlier of the "Twin Redoubts" that protected the Albany Post Road.

19 Barracks for 1,500 to 2,000 men — described as being 1/4 mile up Canopus Brook Road from the Old Albany Post Road split.

20 Canopus Indians were the earliest known residents of the Canopus Valley.

21 Along the east bank of Sprout Brook, many sections of the railroad bed for the narrow gauge iron mine railroad are still intact.

22 Site of the "Soldier's Spring" assumed to be the water supply source for the Revolutionary troops that were barracked here.

23 Seven crude foundations and the remains of red brick ovens still exist on this site near what has been referred to as the ...

24 Headquarters and Parade Grounds mentioned in the Revolutionary History.

25 Also at the crest of Gallow Hill is the site of the hanging of Rose and Palmer, where a historic marker is placed.

26 51 Mile Marker

27 Iron mine railroad gravity counter remains.

28 Another old village house, a good example of "salt box" style.

29 Ross House built prior to the Revolutionary War.

This booklet has been prepared by the Continental Village Property Owners Association, Inc. and is made available to the residents of Continental Village through the compliments of the Association. It is designed to be a ready reference, placing necessary and important information in a concise and compact manner. We hope you will find it informative and useful.

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In Appreciation

The Late Henry Glauber – For the sketches contained herein. Mr. Glauber resided on Ferris Drive in Continental Village and was a resident for many years.

The Late Carlton B. Scofield – For the "Story of Continental Village". Mr. Scofield was born and spent his early childhood in Continental Village. He was Peekskill City Historian.

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THE CONTINENTAL VILLAGE PARK DISTRICT

The Park District concept was conceived in 1966 when Continental Village, Inc., the original developer of Continental Village and owner of the beach, lake, dam, buildings and surrounding village greens, which were situated in two townships and two counties, were in default of taxes. The Continental Village Property Owners Association was compelled by the membership to investigate ways in which the properties could remain in the hands of the community. This presented many legal problems, but it was felt that if the ownership of the properties was to be transferred to anyone other than a community organization the availability of the facilities would be curtailed, if not denied completely.

It was at that time that a group of interested persons in the CVPOA hired an attorney and circulated petitions to the area residents. The petitions outlined the idea of forming a park district, and also to include the parcels of land in Putnam Valley originally purchased from Continental Village, Inc. Why a park district? Because a park district would not have to pay taxes as a private organization would. All residents would assume the cost and would benefit from its operation.

The Park District was officially formed by an agreement of municipal cooperation by the towns of Philipstown, Cortlandt and Putnam Valley on April 30, 1970. The cost of the property was \$36,000. This cost would be paid for by the taxes levied on those persons residing in the Park District area, based on assessed valuation.

A joint advisory committee was formed, which included five members from each township, appointed by the related town supervisor for a period of one year. These persons oversee the operations, prepare budgets, and in general, act as "watchdog" over the Park District. Taxes are levied on each property in the Park District on a yearly basis. These taxes are used to operate the Park District.

In the ensuing years, many improvements have been made to the Park District; the Clubhouse has been renovated; the parking lot has been expanded and graded; a walkway to the beach was put in; aerators were installed in the lake; to name a few. There is a superintendent who is employed by the Park District, whose duties include the maintenance of buildings and grounds, hiring of beach personnel, distribution of beach tags, and overseeing the functions of the Park District.

Meetings are held on a monthly basis on the second Tuesday of each month at the Clubhouse. These are open meetings and all are welcome to attend. Two budget meetings are held during the months of July and August, at which time the budget for the following year is gone over with the public. These meetings follow the General Membership meeting of the CVPOA on the third Friday of July and August.