

# A Short History

Colonie was settled in 1630 by Patroon Kiliaen Van Rensselaer for the Dutch West India Company. Rensselaerswyck included land purchased from the Indians, and ran from Beeren Island in the Hudson River, approximately 11 miles south of the City of Albany, to the Cohoes Falls in the Mohawk River. It extended 24 miles outward from both banks of the river. Archaeological “digs” have provided great numbers of artifacts, both Indian and Dutch. The earliest European settlers were Dutch who left the safety of their original settlement in Fort Orange and moved north in search of good farmland.

The English conquered the colony in 1664. John Campbell, 4th Earl of Loudon, commanded the British Army during the French and Indian Wars in the 1750s. Loudon’s Ferry Road was constructed as a military road in 1756 using planks to support wagonloads of supplies moving north for the great siege of Fort Ticonderoga. Residents later named their hamlet for Lord Loudon. During the American Revolution this was the route used by American General Henry Knox to move cannon from Fort Ticonderoga to drive the British out of Boston, assuring the first American victory of the Revolution.

After the Revolutionary War, a New England element came into the population although the settlement remained Dutch in many respects: language, worship, education, style of architecture, etc., at least until the early 1800’s.

The New England colonists brought fresh enterprise, activity and thrift. The Dutch made bricks from glacial clays, and bluestone and limestone were discovered for building. The Hudson River was a main artery of trade, communication and military supplies. The Shakers settled in this area bringing their unique religion and lifestyles and excelled in advanced farming and industry.

Following the War of 1812, Fulton and Livingston launched the first steamboat, which revolutionized travel and commercial transport. The Erie Canal opened in 1825 and joined the American East and the New West via the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers. The first passenger service steam railroad traveled between Albany and Schenectady in 1831.

Irish and Italian immigrants were brought in to assist in building the Canal and Railroads; they remained in the area. Other nationalities soon followed in large numbers, including German, French, Russian, Ukrainian and Polish families. More recently, Far Eastern and Hispanic families arrived.

During the 20th century, the town grew immensely through industry and business opportunities and a wide variety of people from other countries are now included in the growth pattern. Farming areas have diminished, however, recreational land and historic sites are still abundant. One of the most significant sites, Schuyler Flatts, was named a National Historic Landmark.

The rich past of Colonie continues to play a significant role in the cultural diversity of New York’s Capital District.

## About the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie

Our purpose is to stimulate an appreciation of the historical heritage of the Town of Colonie by encouraging, promoting, and disseminating a greater knowledge of the history and contributions of the people of Colonie; to discover, collect, preserve, and make available any material which may help illustrate the history of Colonie; to promote the preservation of historical buildings, monuments and sites; and to bring together people interested in history, to promote and support historical research and scholarship, to sponsor and organize historical and cultural activities, programs, and events, and to prepare, issue and distribute historical information and publications.

### Historical Society of the Town of Colonie

Memorial Town Hall  
P.O. Box 508  
Newtonville, New York 12128-0508

Historian’s office: (518) 782-2601

Founded in 1971

**Join us today.**

[www.colonie.org/departments/historian/historicalsociety/](http://www.colonie.org/departments/historian/historicalsociety/)

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## Historical Places in the Town of Colonie, N.Y.



*Schuyler Flatts National Historic Landmark*

## 1 Schuyler Flatts



*Schuyler Flatts National Historic Landmark*

Schuyler Flatts Cultural Park is one of the most historic areas in the town of Colonie. It was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1994 after having been listed on both the New York State and the National Registers of Historic Sites in 1974. It is also designated as a National Historic Archeological site. The park contains about 35 acres, outlines and preservation of the foundations of historic houses and farm that include buildings, displays and maps, historic markers, walking and bike paths, a replica of a Dutch barn, and the remains of part of the old Erie Canal that passed through the area.

A Dutch farmhouse and buildings were first built here by the patroon's representative, Arent van Curler, circa 1642. Fr. Isaac Jogues' dramatic escape from the Mohawks in 1643, the site's use as a trading post for furs and other items, its use as a fort, and as a lookout post to sound the alarm in Albany in case of Indian or French attack, are all part of the history of the site.

Around 1672 the original house was replaced by one built by Pieter Schuyler, Albany's first mayor. The site served as an important frontier outpost before and during a lengthy, dangerous, and threatening era of raids on frontier areas by the French and the Indians in the late 1600s and the first half of the 1700s. It served as an important assembly site for thousands of British soldiers during the French and Indian War. The Schuyler house burned in 1759 but was soon rebuilt.

During the American Revolution the Flatts was a staging area for thousands of soldiers headed for Saratoga in 1777 to stop British General Burgoyne's invasion from Canada. That effort successfully changed the outcome of the Revolution. Some of the cannons from Forts Ticonderoga and Crown Point were transported by General Knox through the Flatts on their way to defend Boston from the British in 1775.

The Schuyler family owned the site and operated it as a farm until 1910. The last Schuyler house on the site, pictured above, was set on fire and destroyed by vandals in 1962.

## 2 Pruyn House Cultural Site, Gardens, Buhrmaster Barn, Verdoy School House

The Pruyn House, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is a beautifully restored home situated on 5½ acres, and it has a connection to the Dutch heritage of Colonie and New York's Capital District. This home is one of the oldest private residences in the town of Colonie. It took five years to build.



*Courtesy the Friends of the Pruyn House*

Casparus Pruyn, his wife, Ann, and their eight children occupied this summer home which was built between 1825 and 1830. It was constructed on land leased from Stephen Van Rensselaer III, the last Patroon. It is a blend of Federal and Greek Revival architecture. Mr. Pruyn had been employed by the Patroon as his land agent. Upon the death of Van Rensselaer in 1839, Casparus Pruyn became the owner of the property. The farm originally was comprised of 180 acres. Outbuildings consisted of barns, a carriage house, stables, a smokehouse, a well house, a combined woodshed and privy, a potting shed, and greenhouses. The stables and one barn were lost to fires, and a summer kitchen at the rear of the house was removed to make way for a circular driveway. Very few structural changes have been made to the house.

The house and 5 ½ acres were acquired by the Town of Colonie in 1983 in order to save it. It was decided that after restoration, this site would become an educational, cultural and social center for the Town. The house is furnished in an 1850's style.

There are currently ten buildings on the Pruyn House Complex. They include the Buhrmaster Barn, reconstructed and moved to the site in 1987, and the Verdoy Schoolhouse that was moved to the site in 1995. Other structures include a smokehouse, potting shed, woodshed/privy building, (now the Tool Museum), carriage house, well house and restroom facility. Herb and flower gardens, maintained by a local garden club, are focal points of the site. They feature brick walks, painted fences, and a sun dial.

The Pruyn family of Albany was one of the oldest Dutch families in New York. Frans Jansen Pruyn was the first Pruyn to come to America, arriving in the 1660s. Records show that in 1683 the Pruyns were members of Albany's Dutch Reformed Church. Successive generations married into prominent local Dutch families.

The Pruyn House's operation is overseen by the Friends of Pruyn House a not for profit organization. This group continues to maintain the facility and arranges cultural and social events.

## 3 Albany Rural Cemetery

Albany Rural Cemetery was organized in 1841, as a direct result of a sermon by Rev. Bartholomew T. Welch, D.D., pastor of the Pearl Street Baptist Church in Albany. In his sermon, Rev. Dr. Welch pointed out that most of the small, churchyard cemeteries in the City of Albany would soon be full, and he encouraged the development of a "rural" cemetery, as had become popular throughout Europe in the rural cemetery movement of the mid-19th Century.



*Tomb of President Chester A. Arthur  
Courtesy Google Images*

After Rev. Dr. Welch's remarks, the Albany Cemetery Association was formed, with Welch elected as its first president. The purpose of the Association was to establish a public cemetery on a plan similar to the cemetery at Mount Auburn in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Indeed, Mt. Auburn was the first "rural" cemetery established in this country. It was followed by Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn. Albany Rural was one of the earliest rural cemeteries established in the United States.

The cemetery contains many fine examples of Victorian era cemetery art. Architecturally significant features are also in evidence. The administration building, upper gatehouse building, and chapel were designed by Robert W. Gibson, who also designed All Saints Episcopal Cathedral in Albany. The superintendent's residence was designed by architect Marcus T. Reynolds who was also responsible for many of the monuments and mausoleums.

The Albany Rural Cemetery held its Opening Ceremony on October 7, 1844, with a large procession from downtown Albany to the present day site of the cemetery. A few facts about the cemetery:

- The first burial in the cemetery was in May 1845 on the North Ridge for 21-year-old David Strain, who died of consumption.
- Today the cemetery comprises 467 acres and there are over 110,000 burials.
- The cemetery is divided into three ridges: North, Middle and South.
- Albany Rural is the final resting place of six Civil War Medal of Honor recipients, all interred on the South Ridge.
- Albany Rural claims three Confederate soldiers, one on each ridge.
- There are two special plots that were established for Civil War soldiers: The Soldiers and Sailor's Plot, and the GAR Plot, both of which are located on the North Ridge. The acronym GAR stands for "Grand Army of the Republic" a veteran's organization of Civil War soldiers. There are hundreds of "GAR" markers throughout the cemetery.

Albany Rural is the final resting place of President Chester A. Arthur, who was also a Civil War General. In addition, there are 5 Cabinet Officers, 6 US Senators, 33 US Congressmen, 9 Diplomats, 3 Federal Judges, 3 attendees of the Constitutional Convention, 5 members of the Constitutional Congress, 7 Governors, & numerous State Senators,

Assemblymen, Speakers, Judges and Mayors of Albany interred in the cemetery. There is also a survivor of the Titanic buried in Albany Rural: Albany resident Gilbert M. Tucker, a First Class passenger, left on Lifeboat #7, the first lifeboat launched.

## 4 Watervliet Shaker Historic District

The first permanent settlement of the United Society of Believers in the Second Coming of Christ—the utopian religious sect commonly known as the Shakers—was established here in 1776 by "Mother" Ann Lee and seven disciples from England. The "Shakers" are dedicated to leading a spiritual life through communal living and celibacy. They are renowned for their technological innovation, music, architecture, and beautifully crafted furniture. This community, known as the Watervliet Shakers, reached a peak of 300 members in the 1850s. They were the first to package and sell garden seeds, invented the flat broom, were pacifists involved in abolitionist causes, and strove to achieve gender and racial equality. They were divided into four "families" whose large dwelling houses and work buildings surrounded a central Meeting House. The last Shakers left the community in 1938.



*Shaker Meeting House  
Courtesy the Shaker Heritage Society*

Restored by the Shaker Heritage Society, the 1848 Meeting House features a small museum that explains the Watervliet Shakers' beliefs, lifestyle, and ingenuity. Visitors may take self-guided tours past eight additional Shaker structures, an herb garden, the cemetery where Ann Lee (who died in 1784) is buried, and the nearby Ann Lee Pond Nature Preserve.

The City of Albany purchased the Church Family property in 1925 for the purposes of an airport and subsequently sold it to Albany County, which is working with the Shaker Heritage Society to preserve and promote an interest in the historic site. Some of the nearby barns and other facilities owned by the County were originally Shaker buildings. Thirteen additional Shaker buildings are nearby but they are privately owned and not open to the public.

The Church Family area, where all Shaker related administrative persons worked and where their Meeting House is located, is now owned by Albany County and leased to the Shaker Heritage Society, which operates the property as the Shaker Historic Site. It is open to the public and you are welcome to visit the site.

While the Shaker dwelling houses and shops, buildings and barns are still quite well preserved, several of the original buildings have been demolished.

## 5 Loudon Cottage



The cottage was built between 1800 - 1830, near one of the first encampments of Lord Loudon of the British in the French and Indian War. In 1852 it was owned by Senator Ira Harris, whose daughter, Clara, and her fiancé Major Henry Reed Rathbone, were sitting next to President Lincoln at Ford's Theater. Clara's bloody dress was kept in a closet at the cottage.

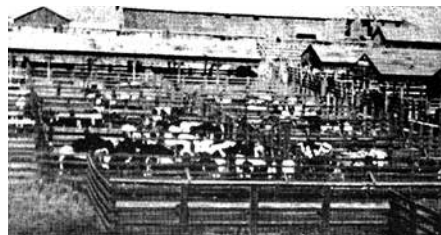
## 6 West Albany Railroad Yards

The rail yards, owned by the New York Central Railroad, were built in 1853 on 350 acres along Patroon Creek and in the area that is now Albany Industrial Park. The large rail facilities built and serviced railroad equipment. Engine 999, which at that time was the world's fastest locomotive, was built there in 1893.



## 7 West Albany Stockyards

In the 1850s the area seemed as wild as the "Wild West". Cattle, sheep and swine were driven to the stockyards, to be loaded on the trains. The stockyards included many animal holding pens and were located near the Albany Railroad yards.



## 8 Tobin Packing Company

In 1924 the Tobin Packing Company was built in West Albany adjacent to the rail line. Tobin First Prize products were a top selling brand in the Northeast.

## 9 Hawkins Stadium



*Courtesy Dennis and Carol Fitzgerald*

The most popular baseball stadium in the Capital District was Hawkins Stadium which was erected in Menands in 1928, replacing the former Chadwick Park. It was named after Michael Hawkins, owner of the local baseball franchise. It was the home of the Albany Senators, a very popular and successful baseball team from 1885-1959.

## 10 Erie Canal-Aqueduct

### Former Crescent Aqueduct

Much of the eastern terminus of the Erie Canal was located in Colonie. Entering the town at Menands, it went through Watervliet and Cohoes, then west along the Mohawk River. The former Crescent Aqueduct (at the present U.S. Route 9 bridge to Halfmoon), carried the canal over the river, which then continued west along its north bank. The aqueduct was removed in 1919 upon the construction of the new Barge Canal system.



## 11 Trolley Turn-Around Building

At the turn of the 20th Century, trolleys were a popular form of transportation along the Albany Schenectady Toll Road through Colonie. The building pictured at right shows the power station that transferred current from AC to DC at the halfway point. This building is east of the Karner Road/Central Avenue intersection and was built by the Schenectady Railway Co.



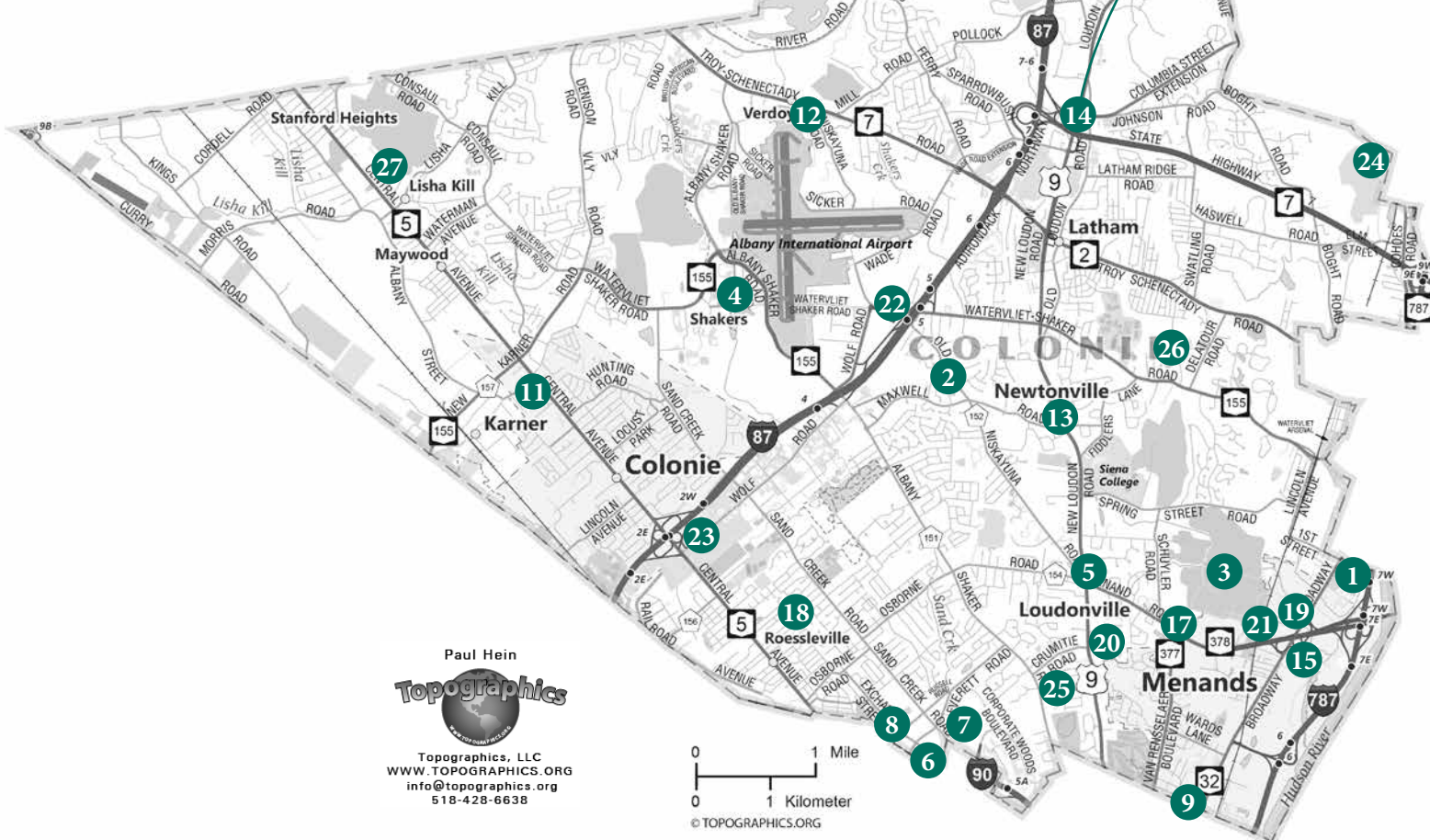
## 12 Hills House

The Ebenezer Hills Jr. House, on Route 7 near the airport was built around 1770. Used as a farmhouse, tavern, inn and Watervliet Town Hall, it gained national notoriety in a murder trial in 1827 that resulted in the last hanging in Albany County. This structure, on the National Register of Historic Places, was recently restored. It is now a successful tea house.



## 27 Lisha's Kill Reformed Church

In the 1800s local people from the Lishakill area of town worshipped at the Niskayuna Reformed Church on Troy-Schenectady Turnpike. In 1852 the Lansing and Groat families, and others, petitioned the Schenectady Classis for their own church. Permission was granted and they worshipped temporarily at the old Watervliet School 8 until 1854 when the Lisha's Kill Reformed Church was dedicated. It is the second oldest Reformed church in Colonie. It is Greek Revival in style, with holdover architectural elements from an earlier period in the bell tower.



## 13 The Newtonville United Methodist Church

In 1828, the Reverend Selah Ireland organized an independent Methodist Episcopal Church. This group built the present Newtonville United Methodist Church in 1893 on land purchased from Stephen Van Rensselaer for \$1.00.



## 14 Knox Trail

Marked by small signs, the trail was used to transport cannons taken from Fort Ticonderoga to Boston by General Knox at the start of the Revolutionary War in 1775. The cannons allowed General George Washington to threaten the destruction of the British troops occupying Boston, who then withdrew.

## 15 Capital District Regional Market

The "Menands Farmers' Market" has been part of the Menand's scene since 1933. It has two parts—Grower's Market, where local growers display and sell their products; and the Shipped In section where wholesalers handle produce from all over the world.



## 16 Dunsbach Ferry

This river area was one of the places to cross the Mohawk River by ferry. The ferry terminated operations when the river was further dammed and widened with the creation of the Barge Canal.



## 17 Sage Estate

The Sage family of Ithaca, Albany, and Menands, should not be confused with another wealthy local family, the Russell Sage family, from Troy. The Menands family, started out in Ithaca, and was in the lucrative Erie Canal shipping and lumber business and eventually gained control of more than one million acres of timber throughout the United States

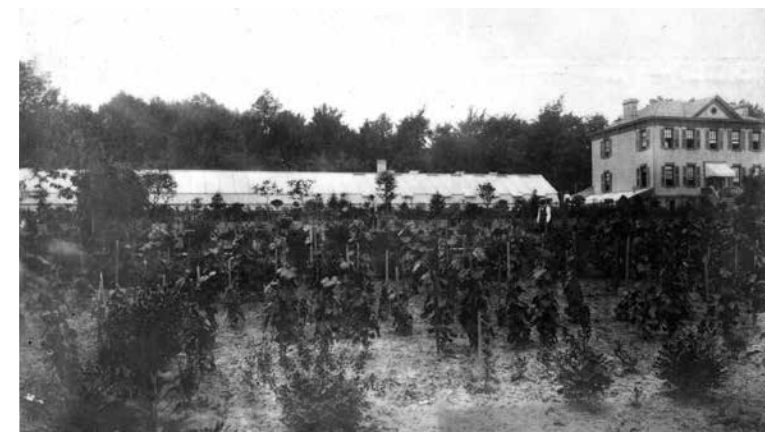
At its largest the estate consisted of 57 acres in Menands. A large mansion residence was constructed in the 1890's of stone, in the manner of an English mansion. It was redesigned by Marcus T. Reynolds in 1920, for many years Albany's leading architect. The mansion, called "Fernbrook," is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



## 18 Celery Fields

Theophilus Roessle was possibly the most successful farmer in the Roessleville area of Colonie. He concentrated his efforts mainly in the cultivation of celery, which he wholesaled to the Washington and Fulton Markets in New York City, the Saratoga hotels, the Catskill Mountain House, and the nearby cities. The area near his residence became known as Roessleville and the Presbyterian church, established there in 1853, continues to be known as the Roessleville United Presbyterian Church.

## 19 Menand Gardens



Just behind the former Menands railway station were the greenhouses of noted horticulturalist Louis Menand and his family, who conducted a large floral business. They also had floral establishments at the Albany Rural Cemetery (which had its own rail station), and a branch on State Street in Albany.

## 20 Distric 11 School House



381 Loudon Road at Crumitie Road. Believed built in 1811, it became part of the Watervliet district, which encompassed a large area of present day Colonie. In 1813, the schoolhouse began operation as a school, until 1926. It housed one of the first libraries in Albany County. It later became an inn, a tea room and then in 1973, a private residence.

## 21 First New York State Fair Site



Along the west side of Broadway, near where the bowling alley now is located, and under the current approach to the Troy Menands bridge, lies the former site of the first New York State Fair. The fair had a grandstand, several large buildings to house exhibits, horse barns, and a half-mile trotting track. See the rendering reproduced here. After the State Fair moved to Syracuse this area was still used for many sporting events, picnics, and amateur games. The track was also used for the training of pacers and trotters. The famous Barnum and Bailey circus used the site. The James E. Strates shows were at the Schuyler Flatts for several years in the 1950s and 1960s.

## 22 Duncan's Inn and Restaurant

At the north end of Old Wolf Road, near the new traffic circle serving Watervliet Shaker Road, Old Niskayuna Road, and Old Wolf Road, was a very popular business that continued to operate for nearly 150 years. It started as a hotel used during the late 1800s by visitors to the Shakers, named Mink's Shaker Hotel.



The hotel was a very popular and upscale spot, with nice rooms, a carriage house, waiters wearing tuxedos and white gloves and with piano music. It became a popular night club around 1900 named Powell's Inn. After it was purchased, it was renamed Duncan's Inn and Restaurant. It continued as a favorite banquet and dining spot until after Mr. Duncan's death, when it became Vittles and Grog. The building has since been torn down.

## 23 Colonie Country Club

The 57 acre Colonie Country Club was located at the corner of Wolf Road and Route 5, Central Avenue, where the Colonie Center shopping center is now located. It was built in 1912 as the Adelphi Country Club but burned soon after. Three years later it was rebuilt, in a much grander style. It operated there until 1963, when it was sold to Sears, Roebuck & Co. (The new campus of the University at Albany was the former location of the Albany Country Club. Both golf clubs moved to new locations near Voorheesville.) The Colonie Country Club also included four summer cottages.



## 24 Former Covered Bridge in Maplewood



A covered bridge once spanned the old Erie Canal at Elm Street in Maplewood.

## 25 D.D.T. Moore Farm

Purchased in 1845 at 52 acres, the farm expanded to 2,500 acres reaching to Corporate Woods. Known as Middlebrook State Premium Farm Peach Orchard, in 1851 it was awarded the best farm in New York State. The white Greek Revival house located on the corner of Leslie Court and Rte. 9 is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



## 26 Mulberry Hill

A farm house built by Stephen Van Rensselaer in 1783 was the refuge for Madam de la Tour du Pin and her family during the French Revolution (1794-1796). She was a close assistant to Marie Antoinette. Her memoirs about how she managed the Mulberry Hill property during her stay provide great insight into Colonie's early history. The house was rebuilt after a fire in 1812. Delatour Rd. was named after Madam de la Tour du Pin. The site is now occupied by The Sisters of St. Joseph as their Provincial House and Chapel.