

History of Peekskill.

JAN PEEK, navigator, Indian trader, Dutchman—that is about all that is authentically known about the adventurous soul whose establishment of a trading station near what is now known as “Blue Rock” in the early part of the seventeenth century, was the beginning of the settlement here by white men and the source of the name of our village. Peek’s kill was primarily the name of the branch of the Hudson here, kill being the Dutch for creek. Jan Peek did not take the bank of the creek that bears his name for a home merely by chance, neither did he, as some historians have stated, mistake it for the source of the river. For years before he made a home off from his craft, he had sailed the Hudson as far up as any civilized man had gone, trading with the Indians and doing some hunting and fishing on his own account. He settled on the shore of the creek—which was then navigable up to about where the pumping station now is—because there he found tillable land, few wild animals and a friendly tribe of Indians. Other Dutchmen and, half a century later, some Englishmen came and built near him. At first the drift of the colony was to the northeast, but before long Macgregories Brook attracted settlers to the south, and old deeds and similar papers show clearly that the settlement of what is now the village of Peekskill began certainly before 1750.

Almost, if not quite, continuous peace with the neighboring Indian, with whom the settlers frequently intermarried, attracted settlers and early Peekskill prospered quietly and peacefully. Except for copies of patents, grants and conveyances little remains to tell the history of the place before Revolutionary times. That outbreak found the section strongly patriotic though not without its Tories, who held to England and it as well that this was so for the situation at the bend of the Hudson and on the post road from New York to Albany was one of great value to whichever force could secure and hold it.

While no pitched battle ever occurred at Peekskill skirmishes in and around the village were numerous. The Colonial Army held the neighborhood generally and where St. Peter’s Church now stand was once a Colonial arsenal. Just west of it and across the Albany Post Road [now Division Street] at the same time was an army hostelry and barracks. All about Peekskill, but more especially in this section, Revolutionary buttons, bullets and fragments of muskets and shells have been found. Washington and other Continental generals frequently passed through the village and on Main Street, about where Roem’s bakery now is, stood for many years a building known as Washington’s

three men. Cortlandt Hook and Ladder Co., "The Truck" was the next fire company formed, dating from May 26, 1833, although its name at that time was Peekskill Hook and Ladder Co. This company for more than seventy years had its headquarters in the same place on Park street, first in a little frame building and then in a part of the present fire building there. Its removal to a home of its own on Main street, last year, was the culmination of fully a dozen years of persistent hard work by its members. Washington Engine Co., No. 2, comes next in order of seniority having been organized September 2, 1840. George Halsted was its first foreman. Following that, December 12th, 1848, Cataract [now Columbian] Hose Co., No. 1, began its life, as a sister company and for the purpose of carrying the hose for Columbian Engine Company, whose new apparatus at that time, unlike its old, did not carry hose. Two companies that were formed in 1852, and did considerable service during their time, but have long disbanded, were Independance [or Eagle, for it was known by both names] Engine Co., No. 3, which had its house on South street, below Smith street, and Lady Washington Hose Co., No. 2, which roomed back of Washington Engine Co. Independance Company disbanded in 1868, and its machine was sold in 1871. Lady Washington Hose continued in service until 1875. At that time the establishment of the Peekskill Water Works with its natural water power made fire engines unnecessary here and considerable change in our fire department resulted. Columbian Engine Company and Washington Engine Company, while retaining their old names, became in truth hose companies. Lady Washington Hose disbanded but Columbian Hose continued. A year later, early in 1876, and named in honor of its natal year, Centennial Hose Co., No. 4, was formed, John Smith, Jr., was its first foreman. This company took the place of the "Independance" in that it was formed primarily for work in the neighborhood of the docks, although as a matter of fact it has been of much real service at all fires of any import since its formation, from its own special locality to Finktown.

Even before Peekskill was a fire district there were schools here and it is notable that reports of superintendents and tax lists as far back as 1800 show Districts No. 7 and 8, of the Town of Cortlandt, covering much the same territories respectively, as do Drum Hill and Oakside now. This might naturally lead to the supposition that there has been little or no change in them during the past century and more in regard extent and number. This is far from the fact. Both have been know by other numbers, both have encroached upon and have been encroached upon by outlying districts. At one time [1840] for a few months they were united in one district. As a general thing, however, the upper district has been Number 8 and the lower, Number 7 and Macgregories Brook has been the line separating them. Drum Hill's first school house of which there is any authentic record was the first story of the building still standing on South street west of the

February 22, 1866, St. Paul's M. E. Church dedicated.
 April 16, 1872, Board of Water Commissioners incorporated.
 April 17, 1873, Peekskill Fire Department incorporated.
 February 17, 1874, great fire at Sing Sing, (now Ossining) at which
 Peekskill Fire Department was of great assistance and in taking
 the companies there a Central train made a record for that distance
 July 24, 1875, Harmony Lodge, No. 138, K. of P., instituted.
 September 30, 1875, water pumped into Peekskill reservoir.
 January 8, 1876, Centennial Hose Co., organized.
 February 24, 1876, carriage house of Dr. P. Stewart burned—first fire
 use of reservoir water.
 May 27, 1878, Dunderberg Lodge, A. O. U. W., instituted.
 July 25, 1879, Abram Vosburg, G. A. R., organized.
 July 1, 1882, State Camp of Instruction, Roa Hook, opened.
 March 19, 1883, Present Charter of Village of Peekskill enacted.
 September 17, 1884, Oakside School formally opened.
 December 16, 1886, Division No. 10, A. O. H., instituted.
 August 9, 1887, DeLancy Cole Post, now Camp, S. O. V., instituted.
 April 15, 1889, Helping Hand Association organized.
 July 3, 1890, Peekskill Co-operative Building and Loan Association
 incorporated.
 October 21, 1890, Corner Stone of Peekskill Music Hall—afterwards
 Depew Opera House and now rebuilt as the Raleigh Hotel—laid.
 September 25, 1892, General James W. Husted died.
 January 10, 1892, Park Street School opened.
 May 12, 1893, Cryptic Hall dedicated.
 January 6, 1894, Wessells' bakery fire; two men burned to death.
 January 15, 1894, Bald Eagle Tribe, I. O. R. M., instituted.
 November 17, 1897, Cryptic Hall fire.
 June 17, 1898, Municipal Building formally opened.
 June 4, 1899, first trolley in Peekskill. Water street line.
 September 13, 1899, Gamewell fire alarm system introduced.
 October 31, 1899, Sing Sing Prison fire, really fought and conquered by
 the Peekskill Fire Department.
 December 7, 1899, Peekskill Council, Knights of Columbus instituted.
 January 28, 1901, the purchase of the Gregory Pharmacy by Charles
 E. Clinton.
 March 1, 1901, Police Court opened.
 May 29, 1901, Depew Park presented to the village by Sen. Depew.
 October 29, 1901, Wm. McKinley Garrison, A. and N. U., instituted.
 December 18, 1901, Peekskill Lodge of Elks instituted.
 March 10, 1902, Peekskill Council, Royal Arcanum, instituted.
 August 18, 1902, Corner stone Elks' Building laid.
 May 12, 1903, Board of Park Commissioners incorporated.
 July 16, 1903, Elks' Building dedicated.
 September 8, 1903, Franklin Street School opened.
 October 10, 1904, Peekskill Aerie of Eagles instituted.
 December 16, 1904, First meeting of Cortlandt Hook and Ladder Com-
 pany in its new building.

