

Historic Resources Survey

**Town of Lexington**

Greene County, New York

Funded in Part by  
Preserve New York, a grant program of the  
Preservation League of New York State  
and the  
New York State Council of the Arts

Prepared by Jessie A. Ravage  
Preservation Consultant  
34 Delaware Street  
Cooperstown, New York 13326

1 December 2015

## Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Introduction and Methodology .....   | 1  |
| Description of Existing Conditions .....                                     | 3  |
| Physical and geopolitical setting .....                                      | 3  |
| Circulation systems and patterns .....                                       | 4  |
| Spatial organization and land use patterns .....                             | 5  |
| Vegetation .....   | 6  |
| Architecture .....   | 6  |
| Hamlets .....  | 8  |
| Illustrations of historic landscape features .....                           | 12 |
| Historical and Architectural Overview .....                                  | 15 |
| Introduction .....   | 15 |
| Early Settlement (ca.1780–1810) .....  | 15 |
| Tanneries on the Mountaintop (1810–ca.1855) .....                            | 19 |
| Agriculture and Resorts (ca.1850–1915) .....                                 | 22 |
| The Catskill Mountain Preserve and Rip Van Winkle Trail (ca.1904–1965) ..... | 27 |
| Reimagined Region of Resort (post–1965) .....                                | 29 |
| Conclusions .....  | 33 |
| Eligibility Considerations and Recommendations .....                         | 37 |
| Historic hamlets/districts .....   | 39 |
| Agricultural and Rural Properties .....                                      | 55 |
| Bibliography .....   | 69 |
| Appendices   |    |
| 1: Survey maps   |    |
| 2: Historic map (1867)   |    |
| 3: Architectural styles found in study area                                  |    |
| 4: Properties identified in CRIS database                                    |    |

# Reconnaissance-Level Historic Resources Survey

Town of Lexington, Greene County, New York

1 December 2015

*Introduction and Methodology*

1

---

## Introduction and Methodology

Reconnaissance-level historic resources surveys are undertaken to identify historic resources and assess the degree of their historic integrity. Surveys can assist municipalities to take a more comprehensive approach in planning for and around identified resources. Such planning might include considerations for planning ordinances in areas with cultural resources, planning for economic development, listing in the National Register of Historic Places, local historic district designations, or specific preservation projects. Sometimes such surveys have their origins in a potential threat to the resources under review.

Historic resources are generally defined as above-ground resources older than 50 years. In this survey, “historic” does not encompass archaeological, or below-ground, resources. Survey reports comment on potential eligibility for listing in the State and National registers; they may also comment on potential significance at the local level, possibly under a local ordinance acknowledging local significance. Reconnaissance-level survey reports often discuss these resources in terms of themes of significance as outlined in the documentation for the National Register of Historic Places. This allows interested parties to grasp the historic integrity<sup>1</sup> and significance of particular resources or groups of resources within a given area.

The Town of Lexington undertook this survey to assess historic architectural resources throughout the Town of Lexington, Greene County, New York, which encompasses about 53,200 acres, as part of its comprehensive planning process. Identifying properties dating to the historic period is of interest to the town in a time of low population and changing environmental prerogatives. The town wishes to understand its resources in order to make decisions that will help it determine the degree to which it wishes to encourage preservation and take into account historic significance of existing resources when allowing proposed changes.

The town retained preservation consultant Jessie Ravage of Cooperstown, New York, to complete the survey. The project was partially funded by Preserve New York, a grant program of the Preservation League of New York State and the New York State Council on the Arts. The town and other granting agencies provided the remainder of the funding.

The preservation consultant conducted field review and photographed individual properties and groups of properties throughout the entire study area from the public highways during May 2015. The field review checked the existing landscape against mapping episodes dating to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ravage also correlated published maps (1856 (Samuel Geil, *Map of Greene County*), 1867 (Beers, *Atlas of Greene County*), and 1903 (USGS Gilboa and Phoenicia quadrangles), which, as a group, show major historic-period land divisions, roads, and property owners, with the current landscape. Concurrent with the field survey, Ravage collected published and manuscript resources related to the study area’s development stored in the

---

<sup>1</sup> The National Register of Historic Places identifies seven aspects of historic integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. In general, properties must be older than 50 years to be eligible or listed on the Register. Themes of significance are detailed in National Register Bulletin 16 available at [http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb16a/nrb16a\\_III.htm](http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb16a/nrb16a_III.htm).

# Reconnaissance–Level Historic Resources Survey

Town of Lexington, Greene County, New York

1 December 2015

*Introduction and Methodology*

2

office of the Town Historian Karen Deeter. Ravage also reviewed the CRIS database maintained by the New York State Historic Preservation Office (NYSHPO) in conjunction with the National Park Service for resources already identified in the Town of Lexington.

The body of this report is neither a simple town history nor an architectural digest. Instead, it discusses the town's historic resources within the larger context of the physical landscape. The report is divided into several sections. The description of existing conditions details Lexington's physical and geopolitical setting; circulation systems; spatial organization and land use patterns including hamlets; vegetation; and architecture. It concludes with photographs of historic landscape features found in the town and of post-historic period subdivision patterns. The historical and architectural overview is a context statement discussing Lexington's historic and architectural development from its settlement beginning in the 1780s through ca.1965. This is broken into chronological sections, each providing an historical overview and a brief discussion of historic features and buildings of the period. The main body of the report concludes with a discussion of the potential eligibility for inclusion in the National and State Registers of Historic Places of historic resources found in the Town of Lexington and a list illustrated with photographs. These properties can be located on the key maps prepared by Don Meltz, independent GIS consultant, in the first appendix. A copy of the 1867 atlas plate of Lexington is provided in Appendix 2; other historic maps can be reviewed on line via links provided in the bibliography. Appendix 3 provides a synopsis of historic building styles found in Lexington. The fourth and final appendix is a table of properties previously assigned Unique Site Numbers (USN) by NYSHPO.

The report is presented both in hard copy (two copies distributed in the Town of Lexington) and a digital version. The town will distribute copies to the NYSHPO and the Preservation League of New York State, the latter as part of the town's contract with the League when New Lisbon received the grant.

Jessie Ravage

1 December 2015

# Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

Town of Lexington, Greene County, New York

1 December 2015

*Description of Existing Conditions*

3

---

## Description of Existing Conditions

### *Physical and geopolitical setting*

The Town of Lexington (approx. 53,200 acres) lies entirely within the Catskill Mountain Park created by the State of New York in 1904. The mountain ridge spanning the southwestern half of the town forms the divide between the Mohawk and Hudson river watersheds. The Schoharie Creek flows generally northerly through the valley north of the ridge to meet the Mohawk near Fort Hunter in Montgomery County; south of the ridge, the Esopus flows generally easterly through Ulster County to meet the Hudson at Saugerties.

The Town of Lexington is located in the southwestern part of Greene County, New York, in the Catskill Mountains. On its south line, Lexington follows the Greene County boundary adjoining Ulster County. On the east, the town boundary strikes a straight line running southwest to northeast and passing just to the west of the peak of Hunter Mountain (4,025'). From the northeast end of this boundary, the town line runs in irregular "steps" over the summits of Rusk (3,680') and Evergreen (3,531') mountains before dropping to the Schoharie Creek about a mile west of the hamlet of Jewett Center in the Town of Jewett, Greene County. North of the Schoharie Creek, the Lexington boundary follows a steep, narrow valley to meet the east-west trending Patterson Ridge (peaks approx. 3,000' above sea level) along which much of the town's north boundary abutting the Town of Ashland is drawn in straight segments over Tower (2,980') and Bald mountains. The town line corners again to the southwest for a short distance to meet the Prattsville town line near the Schoharie Creek. Lexington and Prattsville share a boundary over the creek and up the shoulder of Kipp Hill to just east of the summit of Bearpen Mountain (3,598') where the boundary meets the Delaware County line. It follows that line southwesterly about a half-mile to where the Town of Halcott (Greene County) boundary meets the Delaware County line. Lexington's boundary corners again to follow the Halcott boundary to the northeast shoulder of Vly Mountain (3,476') and the Catskill Mountain Park line. The Lexington-Halcott boundary turns southwest and descends in steps to the Greene County line and the point of beginning in this description.

In the southwestern half of the town, a pass called Deep Notch (1,901') connects the valley of the Schoharie with the valley of the Esopus Creek. Streams flow northeasterly and southeasterly from the deep cleft at the summit of the pass. The northeasterly flowing creek descends nearly 500' to its confluence with the West Kill, which carves a shallow valley running generally east-west from its origin on the west flank of Hunter Mountain. The West Kill bends sharply and then flows north into the Schoharie Creek east of Vinegar Hill (2,069'). Over the course of this descent, three additional streams (unnamed in USGS maps)—all originating about 2,300' above sea level—flow generally easterly to join the West Kill. Bushnellsville Creek flows southeasterly from Deep Notch towards the Esopus in Ulster County.

Additional named streams in Lexington include the Little West Kill near the western line of the town. This drains several smaller streams and flows into the Schoharie Creek. The East Kill



# Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

Town of Lexington, Greene County, New York

1 December 2015

## *Description of Existing Conditions*

4

descends from ridge forming the town's northerly boundary into the Schoharie. There are numerous small tributaries throughout the mountaintop region.

### *Circulation systems and patterns*

In the mountainous terrain of Lexington, development has always been sparse, and the most lasting settlement generally aligns with the two main watercourses, the Schoharie and the West Kill. While the Schoharie, the largest and mostly gently flowing of streams found in the town, has never been a notable water route, the main land routes run along its narrow floodplains and benches. Departing the valley floor, most highways throughout the town follow streams, even very narrow ones, into the steep interior.

New York State has adopted the highway paralleling the north (or east) bank of the Schoharie Creek as NY 23A. The highway traversing Deep Notch and connecting NY 28 in the Esopus Creek valley with NY 23A in the Schoharie Creek valley is adopted as NY 42. These two routes carry the great majority of traffic through the town and provide access to a fairly small number of county and town highways, as well as private roads reaching individual properties and recreational trails in Lexington.

County Highways include Spruceton Road (CR 6), which parallels the West Kill connecting the hamlets of Spruceton and Westkill with NY 42. CR 2 parallels the west (south) bank of the Schoharie Creek downstream of the hamlet of Lexington, ascends the Little West Kill valley, and crosses the town line into the town of Prattsville. CR 3, the old Lexington-Halcott Road, intersects CR 2 high in the Little West Kill valley. North Lexington Road (CR 23C) passes through the northern part of the town connecting NY 23A on the north bank of the Schoharie Creek with the hamlet of East Jewett near the top of the East Kill in the Town of Jewett. CR 13 connects North Lexington Rd (CR 23C) with NY 23A in the Schoharie Valley near the hamlet of Lexington.

Town highways expand the network. New Road parallels CR 13 and connects the Schoharie Creek valley and North Lexington Road (CR 23C) farther north and west. North Beech Ridge Road connects CR 2 on the south bank of the Schoharie to NY 42 part of the way up the pass through Deep Notch. South Beech Ridge Road forms a loop connecting North Beech Ridge Road to NY 42 nearly opposite its junction with CR 6. Chamberlain and Howard roads are the ends of an older alignment of NY 42 that crossed a tributary of the West Kill; they now form shallow angles with the main highway.

The remaining roads in Lexington are generally short (only a few are more than a mile), dead-end segments. At higher elevation, quite a number of these once connected over a ridge or mountain, but with the constriction of settlement in the twentieth century, their upper sections are abandoned and frequently difficult to identify in the reforested landscape. Some of these routes split into fingers reaching out from a bridge. As one rises in the watershed, these short segments less frequently include stream crossings, and quite a number of these very high elevation roads appear to be privately maintained. Examples include Truesdell and Jaeger roads in the Little West Kill valley; Kipp Hill, Minew, and Condon Hollow roads and Brown Street on the upper

# Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

Town of Lexington, Greene County, New York

1 December 2015

## *Description of Existing Conditions*

5

slopes of Beech Ridge; Crump Hill Road in the Bushnellsville Creek valley; and Timber Lake and Broadstreet Hollow roads in the Esopus watershed near the Ulster County line. At lower elevations, examples in the Schoharie Creek valley include Van and Bush roads. Additional historic segments are found in the West Kill valley: these include Wolff, Advan, Mink Hollow, Auffarth, Smith, Baker, Shoemaker, Long, and Deyo roads.

Lexington also features several suburban-style cul-de-sac and loop subdivisions that do not exemplify the historic pattern although a few build out from a historic segment. Van Etten, Park, and Grinnell roads are recently opened subdivisions in North Lexington. Goff Road and Mary Saniato Drive are located on Beech Ridge. There are two large cul-de-sac examples in the West Kill valley. Deer Lane and Overlook Drive are platted off CR 2 in the Little West Kill Valley. Subdivisions built out or based on a historic highway include the upper section of Rappelyea Road adjoining the hamlet of Lexington and Kelly Drive on Beech Ridge.

Finally, the Spruceton Trail footpath and the rudimentary truck trail to Hunter Mountain in Lexington form part of a recreational trail network of the Catskill Mountain Park.

### *Spatial organization and land use patterns*

The Town of Lexington lies entirely within the “blue line” of the Catskill Mountain Park. Most of the southwestern part of the town—exclusive of the West Kill valley, the Broad Street Hollow area, and the Bushnellsville area on the Ulster County line—is owned by the state and managed as part of the Hunter–Westkill Forest Preserve. The Rusk Mountain Wild Forest area is a narrow section that caps the ridge northeast of the West Kill valley. Otherwise, all or most land in Lexington is privately owned in parcels of widely varying sizes.

A comparison of the tax parcel map with the 1867 Beers atlas shows the degree to which early subdivision of lands in the Town of Lexington can still be traced today, although with varying degrees of integrity. The land in the Hunter–Westkill Forest Preserve retains nearly all of its early rectilinear subdivision pattern. Evidence of early square lot subdivision is strong along the Halcott town line; square lots can be traced underlying recent subdivision in Lexington and Beech Ridge where almost no historic-period infrastructure save the highways survives.

The atlas shows that lands bordering the main watercourses—the Schoharie and the West Kill—were divided for lease or sale into narrow strip lots that incorporated frontage on the transportation corridor traveling the valley floor and then rose steeply. A large portion of this pattern survives in present land division in the West Kill valley. This organization is apparent, but much more difficult to trace in the Schoharie valley. Hamlet development and twentieth-century subdivision in both valleys has divided small house lots off from the strip lots along the road frontages.

Lexington features a substantial number of suburban-style subdivisions outside the forest preserve lands. These include a variety of patterns popular in recent decades including narrow strip lots off an existing road, cul-de-sac plats, and loops with multiple drive accesses. These are most common in North Lexington and on Beech Ridge, where evidence of historic-period settlement is very diminished due to a constricting economy and radical population decline.



# Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

Town of Lexington, Greene County, New York

1 December 2015

## *Description of Existing Conditions*

6

There are also two large subdivisions on the north slope of the West Kill valley. None of these subdivisions is developed to capacity at present, and they appear in many cases to have many houses used as second homes.

Evidence of historic land use in Lexington is variable. Remnants of agricultural infrastructure can be seen in the West Kill and Schoharie Creek valleys; even less evidence survives elsewhere in the town. Of the tanning and bark industries of the first half of the 1800s, there appears to be no above ground evidence. Some millraces and ponds constructed during the water-powered industrial era may still be traced. There is some evidence of timber activity, and there is a large quarry on the Prattsville town line.

### *Vegetation*

The majority of the Town of Lexington is cloaked in thick second growth native forest composed of hardwoods including beech and sugar maple as well as hemlock. Open grassland, much of it disused meadow and pasture, is found along highways outside of the forest preserve. Residents cultivate lawns and shrubbery on house lots. Sugar maples are frequently planted as shade trees; in some sections they are also planted along the edge of highways.

### *Architecture*

The built environment of Town of Lexington encompasses a variety of building types, styles, and construction materials representative and characteristic of different activities carried out by residents during the past two centuries. These activities include agriculture, commerce, and resort development. Of Lexington's early water-powered industries and tanneries, virtually no above-ground evidence beyond millraces and ponds remains. Buildings are limited to the places reached by a highway network constricted by steep, heavily wooded slopes. The largest concentrations of buildings in the town are located in the hamlets along the Schoharie Creek, the West Kill, and to a lesser degree, the Little West Kill and Bushnellsville Creek.

The majority of these buildings are vernacular frame dwellings constructed during the historic period (pre-1965). Farmhouses—mainly nineteenth-century vernacular interpretations of the Greek Revival, Italianate, and Queen Anne tastes—are located throughout areas not within the Forest Preserve in Lexington. Few farmhouses in the town postdate ca.1880 even at lower elevations. Most exhibit simple rectangular massing with gabled roofs, which vary in orientation relative to the highway. Fenestration tends to be regular and trim details restrained except for verandas, which frequently retain a variety of millwork trim schemes. Some later nineteenth-century examples retain additional decorative trim work characteristic of Victorian-era eclectic styles. Many exhibit stylistic alterations dating to the turn of the twentieth century. This was surely less costly than building a new house.

Houses in hamlets are generally similar in scale and detail to those on farmsteads; they simply occupy smaller lots. There are additional early twentieth-century houses, mainly in rural sections, featuring designs influenced by the popular taste for bungalows in the early 1900s. These are mainly modest in scale and plainly trimmed.



# Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

Town of Lexington, Greene County, New York

1 December 2015

## *Description of Existing Conditions*

7

There are two historic-period stone houses in the town. One is an eighteenth-century farmhouse on Van Road; the other is the unusual stone house at Echo Farm built as a summer estate in the early 1900s. Both are determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Some houses are associated with outbuildings. In the hamlets, these are typically carriage barns built in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. These tend to be fairly plain two-story gable-roofed buildings featuring large openings on the main floor. At elevations as high as 1,700', a few historic farmsteads retain outbuildings and some open land, but most of the upland historic agricultural landscape context is lost save for stone fencing threading its way through second growth forest. Nevertheless, some farmsteads preserve highly intact barns. An early example on Jennings Hill Road was moved onto a high, banked basement later in the historic period. A pair of small barns built before 1850 and now set at right angles to one another stand in an open field at the south end of South Beech Ridge Road. A later (ca.1900) gambrel-roofed barn stands alone, its associated house gone, at the top of Kipp Hill Road. A pair of gambrel-roofed barns on steeply banked foundations face a frame house across CR 2. The larger main barn features a "flyover" ramp to the mow. North of the Schoharie Creek there are also a few examples of historic farm properties with barns at higher elevations including ones on CR 13 and CR 23C.

The summer resort trade of the eastern Catskills spread into Lexington during the latter half of the 1800s. The highways paralleling the Schoharie Creek and crossing the pass at Deep Notch offered access for holiday makers seeking natural beauty and cool, mosquito-free mountain air. The inn at the east end of the hamlet of Lexington served this clientele as did the Deyo House near the hamlet of Westkill on the Deep Notch Road. The first of the large purpose-built summer hotels were built in and around the hamlet of Lexington in the 1870s; a third was added in the 1880s. Alongside these hotels, farmers at all elevations went into the boarding house trade. Many of these properties can be identified by large, plainly built wings and ells added to older farmhouses. The development of automobile tourism supported older hotels and boarding houses for a time, but new tourists also camped and sought accommodation more in keeping with the wooded landscape. A few people built seasonal rustic camps and bungalows generally tucked into the woods alongside rushing streams. There may also be a few buildings constructed as individual tourist cabins on properties along the former Rip Van Winkle Trail, now NY 23A. In the post-World War II era, motels replaced tourist cabins as the preferred single-night accommodation; Lexington has two examples of this type.

The town of Lexington also retains a variety of mainly nineteenth-century buildings constructed as churches, schoolhouses, and commercial properties that served local people. Except for the schoolhouses, these are all found in hamlet areas. Lexington and West Kill each has a Greek Revival church, both built by Baptists; each hamlet also features a late nineteenth-century church. In Westkill, the Methodist church with its corner tower and short spire forms the eastern bookend to the older Baptist church on either side of the little frame lecture hall and the early period graveyard. In Lexington, a church with a similar plan and lancet windows faces NY 42 near the east end of the hamlet. The Spruceton church dates to the same era and features much the

# Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

Town of Lexington, Greene County, New York

1 December 2015

## *Description of Existing Conditions*

8

same design. The Gothic-influenced former Roman Catholic church (NR listed, 2002) is east of that on Church Street.

The former District No. 9 one-room schoolhouse stands at the fork where CR 2 and CR 3 meet; a hip-roofed schoolhouse stands on a sliver of land adjoining the Little West Kill farther downstream on CR 2; a third with late nineteenth-century decorative wood trim is located on Spruceton Road (CR 6) west of the hamlet of Spruceton. The Moderne Hunter-Tannersville school constructed to house the consolidated school district faces NY 42 at the west end of Lexington hamlet.

Lexington and Westkill hamlets preserve a handful of commercial buildings too. The Westkill post office is a nicely preserved Greek Revival storefront building. A building of similar date and scale with additional Italianate details stands adjacent to the bridge over the Schoharie Creek in Lexington. A turn-of-the-century commercial building is near the east end of Westkill. The post office in Lexington has been replaced with a new building at the east end of the hamlet; this lowslung masonry facility has a deep setback and occupies a large lot out of scale with village commercial lots.

### *Hamlets*

There are four physically identifiable unincorporated historic hamlets—Lexington, Westkill, Spruceton, and Bushnellsville (this hamlet straddles the town and county boundary at the southern edge of Lexington)—in the Town of Lexington. Each is recognizable as relatively densely settled place featuring houses and commercial, civic, and religious buildings. All lie on or near the main routes through the town. There were, in addition to these hamlets, neighborhoods labeled North Lexington, Broad Street Hollow, and Mosquito Point still mapped in 1903 by the USGS, but the physical evidence of these places is virtually gone.

Lexington is the largest hamlet in the town. It centers on the plate-and-girder through-truss bridge carrying NY 42, which originates in the eastern half of the hamlet at its junction with CR 13A where it crosses the Schoharie Creek. CR 13A is the historic route along the creek, which was adopted as NY 23A in the early 1900s. The state realigned the highway at the northern edge of the floodplain (about a half-mile wide at this point) after the historic period to bypass the densely settled hamlet, which flanks both sides of a narrow main street. The realignment severed a pedestrian connection between an old resort hotel and the hamlet cemetery at the new highway's junction with CR 13. Development lining NY 42 on the south side of the creek forms a less densely developed continuation of the hamlet—almost a suburb—as it ascends a hill to the bridge over the West Kill about a half-mile from the Schoharie Creek crossing.

Most lots on the north side of CR 13A feature narrow frontages. On the south side of the highway, lots extend to the bank of the creek. Lots facing NY 42 in the hamlet are generally larger and wider than those on the north side of the creek. On the north side of NY 42, later resort properties, including the National Register-listed Lexington house, mingle with early period houses. On the south side of the highway, small lots, several with recently built houses, are subdivided from larger, formerly agricultural parcels that rise steeply from the valley to wooded

# Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

Town of Lexington, Greene County, New York

1 December 2015

## *Description of Existing Conditions*

9

slopes. This side of the highway presents the most varied appearance in terms of houses and lot size than other sections of the hamlet. The former Hunter-Tannersville school, now housing the town offices and fire department, on the south side of NY 42 is the visual end of the hamlet development at the western end of Lexington.

The hamlet of Lexington features two large, three-story frame resort hotels constructed during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, one on either bank of the creek near the bridge. Another frame hotel largely hidden by foliage stands at the intersection of CR 13 and the new alignment of NY 23A. Just above that is the Lexington cemetery.

On the north bank of the creek, a small Greek Revival-style commercial building with a later Italianate façade stands on the west side of NY 42, tucked between CR 13A and the creek bank. East of the commercial building, modest one-and-a-half-story, gable-roofed vernacular frame houses built during the first half of the nineteenth century line both sides of NY 42, most with their eave walls facing the road, for about a third of a mile. A frame church with a corner tower and entrance stands at the east end of this group on the south side of the highway. Somewhat later houses continue on this side of the highway to the former Catholic church. A large, two-story, side-gabled frame house with a two-story veranda and several additions faces the north side of NY 42. A group of nineteenth-century agricultural outbuildings stands behind; these are best viewed from NY 23A. This was used an inn by the mid-1800s and forms the visual center of this section of the hamlet.

CR 13A extends the linear plan of the hamlet westward along the north bank of the creek from its intersection with NY 42. Additional houses line both sides of the highway to the place where CR 13A runs into the new alignment of NY 23A at a shallow angle at the west end of the hamlet. This part of the hamlet features a greater variety of nineteenth-century vernacular frame houses. The earliest examples exhibit one-and-a-half and two-story, side-gabled elevations typical of the second quarter of the century. These are interspersed with later frame houses with deep eaves and raking cornices characteristic of the post-Civil War period. Several houses feature large boardinghouse additions. The third and oldest frame church stands midway along the north side of CR 13A. It features the frontal-gable façade, deep frieze, corner pilasters, and full return of well-developed Greek Revival-style meetinghouse popular from the 1830s into the 1850s. This was updated later in the century with a corner tower similar to the church farther east in the hamlet. A shed-roofed frame commercial building stands nearly opposite the church, its back wall aligned with bank of the creek.

Westkill in the upper West Kill valley remains a sizable linear-plan hamlet. Visually, it now originates at the intersection of Spruceton Road (CR 6) with NY 42, which is marked by a triangle and flagpole. Historically, the hamlet developed between the West Kill and the long millrace drawing water off the creek just above where the main stream bends sharply northeast. Nineteenth-century mapping indicates that people considered adjacent development facing the road to Deep Notch (now adopted as NY 42) adjacent to Spruceton Road to also be part of the hamlet. The Westkill Cemetery is located south of the intersection of Spruceton Road with NY 42 and is accessed from the state highway. It features burials spanning a period beginning in the late



## Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

Town of Lexington, Greene County, New York

1 December 2015

### *Description of Existing Conditions*

10

1800s and is still in use. A smaller, earlier graveyard is located near the churches at the heart of the hamlet. Beyond the narrow floodplain of the West Kill, the land rises quickly to the steep, wooded slopes of the Forest Preserve enclosing the settlement. Lots on Spruceton Road differ in appearance from those on NY 42. Buildings on the former stand on level lawns bordered by street trees; lots on NY 42 are sloped and rise quickly to the steep, wooded hillsides behind. The east end of Westkill is defined visually by an obvious break between the narrow hamlet frontages of the densely settled section and the larger lots of former agricultural properties adjoining the valley floor.

On Spruceton Road (CR 6), vernacular frame houses built during the nineteenth century, two churches, a Greek Revival-style commercial building now used as the post office, a lecture hall, and a community hall built at the turn of the twentieth century line both sides of the highway on narrow village lots. The houses include two or three examples that may predate 1825 and more dating to the second quarter of the century. Still later examples incorporate a variety of mid-Victorian details; earlier houses feature later alterations and additions. These include boardinghouse wings, towers, and open porches. The Greek Revival-style Baptist church retains many of its early details including corner pilasters, a deep frieze, and a full return. The single-stage tower is centered above the center entrance and capped by steeple not unlike the one above the corner tower of the later Methodist church two doors to the west. Between these stands a very plain, single-story, frontal-gable building resembling a schoolhouse that may be the "Lecture Room" mapped in 1867. At the east end of the hamlet a later side-gabled, equally plain frame building is the community hall. There is also a small firehouse in Westkill.

The tiny linear hamlet of Spruceton midway up the upper West Kill valley features a small group of houses centered on a late nineteenth-century frame church next to a graveyard enclosed by a stone wall. Mature sugar maples line the highway frontages.

The linear-plan hamlet of Bushnellsville parallels NY 42 and straddles the Ulster County line where the Bushnellsville Creek flows through a narrow canyon flowing south out of Deep Notch from the town of Lexington into the town of Shandaken. Dwellings in the northern part of Bushnellsville lie in town of Lexington; a larger number of dwellings as well as other types of building are located farther south in Shandaken. Houses on the west side of NY 42 occupy narrow slivers of floodplain between the creek and the road. Farther north, additional tiny house lots line a similar sliver on the east side of the highway.

The north end of Bushnellsville encompasses a row of one-story, side-gabled bungalows featuring porches tucked under the front roof faces built in the auto tourism era. Downstream, a small early period side-gabled house stands on the bank of the stream. Below that an earlier two-story hip-roofed house wrapped by an open porch may be of similar date to the bungalows, but it may be an earlier boardinghouse. Three modest mid-twentieth-century houses occupy a narrow sliver of floodplain near the town line.

North Lexington, a high elevation hamlet largely gone by 1903, is identified only by a small group of buildings at the junction of CR 52 and CR 23C. Similarly, Mosquito Point—at the north

## Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

Town of Lexington, Greene County, New York

1 December 2015

*Description of Existing Conditions*

11

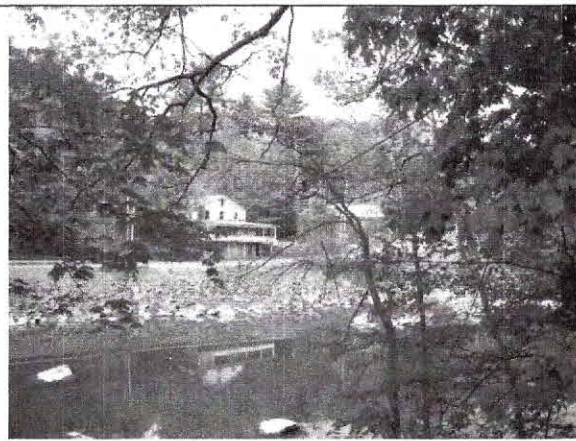
---

end of Beech Ridge Road where it meets CR 2—is represented by building that might have been a roadhouse in the auto tourist era and a solitary barn.

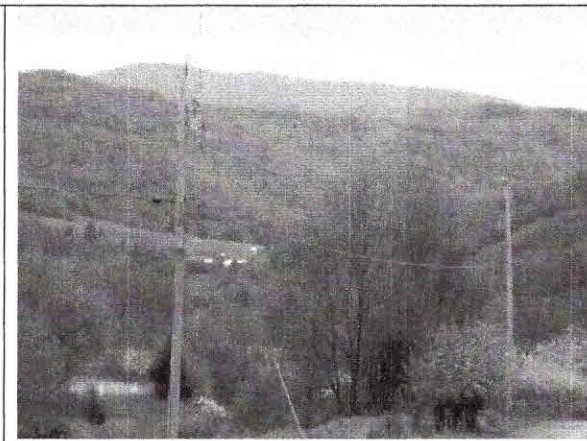




View south over Schoharie Creek from NY 23A to CR 2



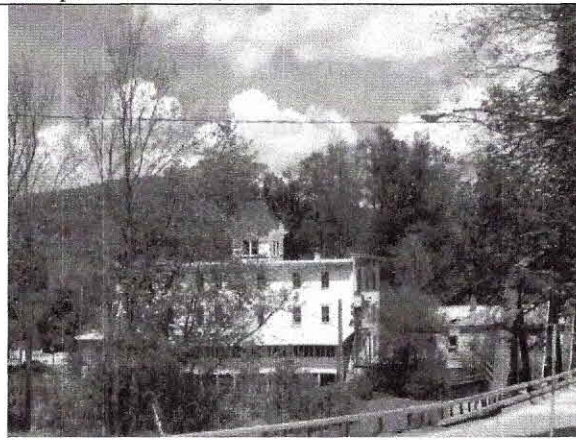
Mosquito Point area, viewed from NY 23A



View northeast from Truesdell Rd



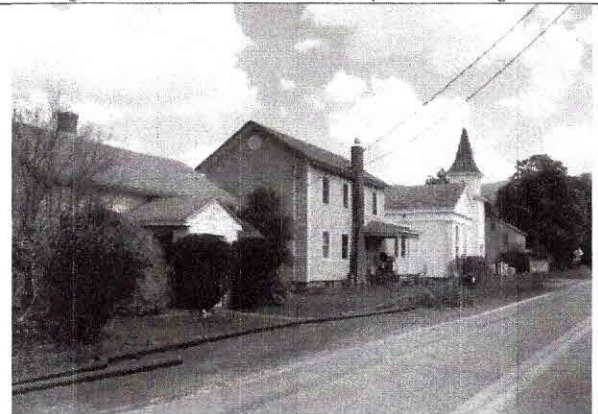
Lexington hamlet, east end with Vly Mt in background



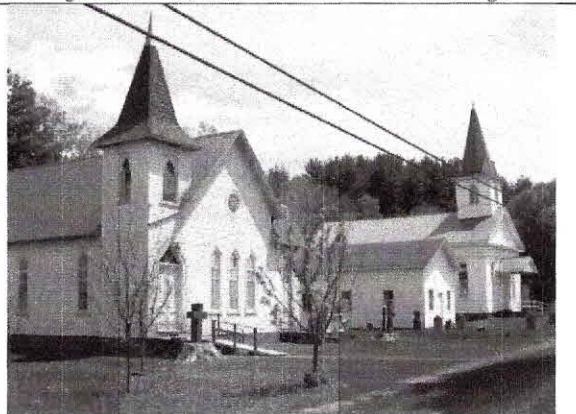
Lexington hamlet, view north from NY 42 bridge



Lexington hamlet, NY 42 north side east from bridge



Lexington hamlet, CR 13A, view east on north side

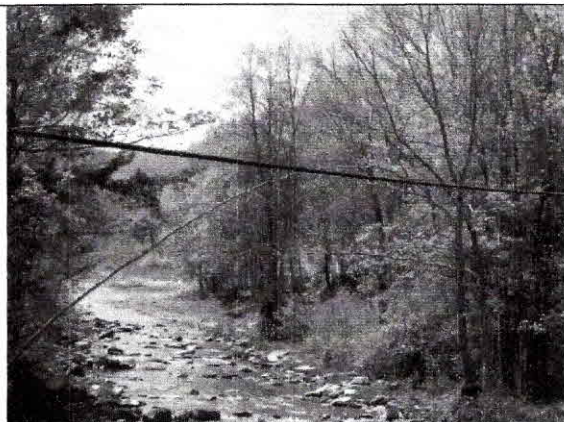


Westkill hamlet, churches on Spruceton Rd (CR 6)



Westkill hamlet, south side Spruceton Rd (CR 6)

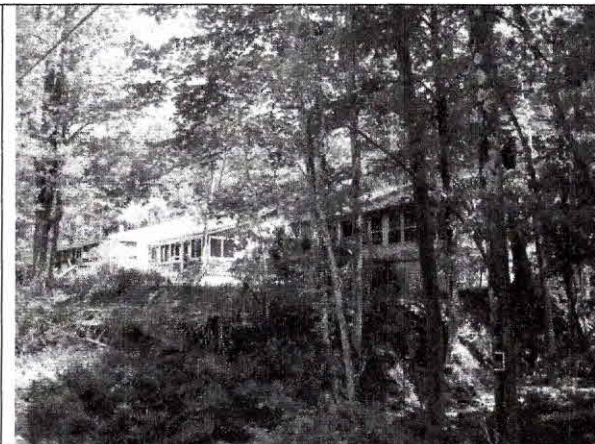




View up West Kill near NY 42 bridge



Chamberlin Rd, view north



Bushnellsville, bungalows on NY 42

# Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

Town of Lexington, Greene County, New York

1 December 2015

*Historical Narrative and Architectural Overview*

15

---

## Historical Narrative and Architectural Overview

### *Introduction*

The Town of Lexington lies in western Greene County in the high peaks region, also known as the mountaintop, of the Catskill Mountains. In the early 1700s, it was part of a two-million-acre tract patented by the British crown to Johannes Hardenbergh and others. These rugged lands were largely untenanted until after the close of the American Revolution in 1783. In the following decades people mainly from southern New England and some descendants of early Dutch settlers in New York acquired land in the area that became Lexington *via* deeds and leases. People opened roads along the valleys and into the cloves. They cleared farms and ran mills using the abundant waterpower. Some harvested timber and furs.

By the early 1820s, hemlock bark was being extracted in prodigious quantities from the hillsides, and the nascent tanning industry recorded in the 1810 census exploded. Until the early 1850s, when the bark was largely removed, tanning was an important part of the local economy. Land cleared of trees was turned to farming, especially dairying for butter making. Alongside farming, the region developed as a summer resort following the cue of older establishments farther east overlooking the Hudson River. In the last quarter of the century, a few Lexington residents opened some fairly large frame hotels for this summer trade, but boardinghouses formed the bulk of this business in the town.

With the close of the tanning industry, Lexington's population fell steadily through the second half of the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth century. Farming, primarily dairy farming, formed the continually eroding economic mainstay into the second half of the twentieth century. The importance of tourism in various forms has ebbed and flowed throughout the period. In 2000, the number of households in Lexington is half the number of housing units in the town—an indication that many houses are second homes and seasonal rentals. Lexington is near to ski resorts in the adjacent towns of Hunter and Windham, where the 10-week summer season is augmented, even exceeded, by a winter season based on alpine skiing.

### *Early Settlement (ca. 1780–1810)*

The area now encompassed by the Town of Lexington boundary in Greene County lies in an enormous tract of land numbering approximately two million acres west of the Hudson River and south of the Susquehanna River that was patented to Johannes Hardenbergh (1675–1745) and others in 1708. The patent boundary encompasses the headwaters of the Delaware River, which drains into the Delaware Bay, as well as large creeks that drain the generally mountainous region in all directions. The region seemed terribly remote: steep, inaccessible mountains rose rapidly from the Hudson River. Densely wooded and populated by large predators, especially the panthers, or mountain lions, that give the Catskills their name, it seemed inhospitable to agriculture, which was the primary desire of landlords and the pursuit of their tenants. Few people

# Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

Town of Lexington, Greene County, New York

1 December 2015

*Historical Narrative and Architectural Overview*

16

of the time—and probably virtually none in the colony of New York—found anything romantic or appealing in the wild, unruly nature of this region.

Until the mid-1700s, the partners in the patent traded and sold shares in the tract, but these shares were not tied to a physical survey. Although a common state of affairs in the colonial era, this created extremely convoluted titles to actual parcels when surveys were completed and lots assigned. Robert Livingston (1688–1775) of Clermont, the name of his large estate on the east bank of the Hudson River with a view of the Catskills, speculated widely in land on the west bank of waterway, and by the time his death, he owned roughly half of the Hardenbergh Patent. His son Robert Livingston (1718–1775) had numerous children—three sons and six daughters—amongst whom the vast Livingston lands were divided. The great lots (Nos. 20, 21, and 22) that composed the present Town of Lexington in Greene County are part of the subdivision of these lands.<sup>1</sup>

At least one secondary source says a few people settled within the Lexington boundary before the signing of the Treaty of Paris that ended the American Revolution in 1783. Livingston leased at least one parcel in 1777, although this does not mean anyone lived on the land.<sup>2</sup> A man named Dryer is credited with opening and running a woolen factory on the West Kill ca.1780. Jerome Van Valkenburgh, one of three early settlers with the same surname, and the Butlers, who came from Herkimer County, are also said to have settled in the Westkill hamlet area about the same time.<sup>3</sup> The stone house on Van Road may also predate 1783, and it is probably the oldest extant building in the town.

Within a generation, however, the West Kill and also the Schoharie Creek, or Kill, and the surrounding thick forests drew many more potential industrialists and entrepreneurs to the region. The Mountaintop offered large supplies of timber and furs on inexpensive lands.<sup>4</sup> While the economic opportunity offered by these goods may seem quaint to a twenty-first-century reader, their importance in the economy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can hardly be underestimated. Settlement soon flanked both banks of the Schoharie Creek and ascended the north side of the valley into the section now known as North Lexington (also called Barbertown locally for several branches of a family of that name who lived there).<sup>5</sup> A map of Lot 21 in the

---

<sup>1</sup> “Patent Map of Greene County,” prepared by William E. Higgins, published in Field Horne, *The Greene County Catskills: A History* (Hensonville, New York: Black Dome Press, 2005): xiv-v.

<sup>2</sup> F.W. Beers, *History of Greene County, New York: with illustrations ... and portraits of old pioneers and prominent residents* (New York: George McNamara, 1884 (reprinted Cornwallville, New York: Hope Farm Press, 1969)):351. Edwin C. Holton, apparently a journalist, wrote the article on Lexington in the Beers subscription-supported *History of Greene County* published in 1884. While hyperbolic in places, the piece appears generally to have been based on sound research. His oral sources are, of course, long gone. And, it seems some of the written records he used are also lost. His work was frequently garbled by Jessie VanVechten Vedder in her county-supported history published in 1927. Her account was further debased in the leaflet published for the national bicentennial.

<sup>3</sup> Beers, 360.

<sup>4</sup> Horne, 44.

<sup>5</sup> Horne, 45, and Beers 352.



## Reconnaissance Level Historic Resources Survey

Town of Lexington, Greene County, New York

1 December 2015

*Historical Narrative and Architectural Overview*

17

Hardenbergh Patent in this period drawn by John Wigram showed long, narrow strips of land perpendicular to the Schoharie Creek labeled with residents' names.<sup>6</sup> Some could still be found in the mid-1800s. A highway was cut along the north bank of the Schoharie through the town of Woodstock, as the area was still designated in 1793.<sup>7</sup>

The formation of religious societies frequently marks the time when a number of people who have devoted nearly all effort to "opening land" achieve a degree of success. Those in this part of the earlier, much larger town of Windham, formed a Baptist Society in October 1790.<sup>8</sup> It is unclear from the secondary sources whether it was designated as the "Lexington Baptist Society," a name preceding the designation of the town when it was erected nearly a quarter century later, or if the society acquired "Lexington" after 1813 when the town was named. Shops and stores oriented to local trade opened during the 1790s.

Also during the 1790s, the New York legislature allowed the formation of private corporations for internal improvements, especially highways. Many turnpike companies were chartered in an effort to improve access to markets for newly opening lands in the state and farther west. The Susquehanna Turnpike opened about 1800. From the Hudson River port at Catskill, it ran northwest through Cairo and Durham in present-day Greene County and the Delaware County towns of Roxbury, Stamford, and Franklin to Unadilla in Otsego County. There it crossed the Susquehanna River and continued northwest into newly opened lands in Chenango County. This route bore a steady stream of people and goods and animals, especially cattle destined for the abbatoires at Catskill, which lay about four miles south of the northern extent of ship navigation on the river.<sup>9</sup> The animals were reconditioned after their long walks from the interior in pastures on the floodplain surrounding the port before being slaughtered, butchered, and brined in barrels for the export market.<sup>10</sup> In 1802, the Schoharieville (later renamed Prattsville) Bridge Company was chartered. It threw a bridge over the Schoharie Creek just below its confluence with the Batavia Kill. The company also built a turnpike paralleling the Batavia Kill through Windham to Cairo.

In largely unsettled sections, municipal and county boundaries encompassed large territories. As the number of people and assets increased, new government divisions were drawn. At the end of the American Revolution, the land now encompassed by the Lexington town boundary lay in the early town of Woodstock established in 1787 in Ulster County. A dozen years later in 1798, the town of Windham was set aside from Woodstock. Windham was a very large town forming most of the western part of present-day Greene County. Towns within its original border include Hunter and Lexington, both divided off in 1813. Prattsville was taken from

---

<sup>6</sup> Beers, 352. Holton cited this map in a manner suggesting he was looking at it.

<sup>7</sup> Horne, 31.

<sup>8</sup> Beers, 356.

<sup>9</sup> Horatio Gates Spafford, *Gazetteer of State of New York, etc.* (Albany: B.D. Packard, 1824): 209.

<sup>10</sup> Horne, 35-6.