



Historic Tour of
Copake Falls, New York

*Please do not trespass on private property.
Private houses are not open for touring. Thank you.*

Copake Falls, New York

The hamlet of Copake Falls sits in a lush valley of the Taconic Mountain range, where indigenous Mohicans lived and hunted long before European settler-colonists began to drive them away. The area's lakes, streams, and forests made it a good place to live, with access to fish and game, as well as stone for arrowheads and other resources. They and other Hudson Valley tribes repeatedly migrated to various locations in New York and Western Massachusetts, generally moving west under pressure from European appropriation of land and resources. Many settled in what became Shawano County, Wisconsin. The others were forced further west to reservations in Indian Territory during the 1830s.

What the Dutch had claimed as New Netherland became the English colony of New York after 1664, and the Hudson Valley became a region of farming, trade, agriculture and industry. Scottish-born merchant Robert Livingston established a farm near Copake and in 1715 he was granted 160,000 acres of land in what is now Columbia County by King George I.

Livingston relied on indentured servants and tenant farmers to work his land. Some of these indentured servants were tasked with mining iron ore in Ancram and Copake Lake, until they had worked off their debt to Livingston. Once discharged from their indentured contracts, many accepted Livingston's offer to lease parcels of his land. These tenant farmers paid tribute to the Livingstons by providing them with a portion of their grain and timber harvests. This combination – farming, logging, and mining – shaped the local economy for the next two hundred years. Timber and iron ore, in particular, put our little hamlet on the map.

35 Valley View Road: Copake Iron Works

From 1845 to 1903, the iron works established by Lemuel Pomeroy on Bash Bish Brook defined the settlement. Pomeroy, who had previously managed a Livingston blast furnace in Ancram (about nine miles southeast of Copake Falls), founded the Copake Iron Works with his three sons in the same year that Texas became the 28th state and Frederick Douglass published his autobiographical narrative of slavery. The location provided not only a source of iron ore but also abundant water power from Bash Bish Brook and access to timber that could be turned into charcoal for heating the raw ore.

In 1862, Frederick Miles purchased the Iron Works and ten years later he and his sons rebuilt the furnace. At around the same time, competitors, who smelted iron using more efficient anthracite coal from Pennsylvania, gained an advantage over the Miles' charcoal fueled furnace. As a result, production at the Copake Works began to decline. Fortunately, its charcoal-smelted iron was still the preferred material for making train wheels. Frederick Miles also began producing iron plows for farmers and barrels for guns, which sustained profits. By 1878, the settlement counted 200 residents and supported “two stores, a hotel, depot, and two churches, making it the largest of Copake's several hamlets.”

Miles died in 1896, and the Iron Works changed hands before closing in 1903. In the 1920s a foundry based out of Hillsdale used the spot for a few years while they rebuilt their own in Hillsdale. In 1927 the State of New York acquired the Iron Works and surrounding forests to create Taconic State Park.



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Cover: Rolling hills of Copake Falls set in the Taconic Mountain Range

Clockwise from top left:
 Bash Bish Falls; Copake Iron Works (1845–1903);
 Livingston Manor, land granted to Robert Livingston by
 King George in 1715; The Columbia Chilled Plow, an
 Iron Works product

35 Valley View Road: Link House

Before the Iron Works, there was little infrastructure here other than the forests and a few crude buildings. The Pomeroy's built the first permanent houses to accommodate the employees of the Iron Works. One of the original houses is still standing, Remembered as the Link House, this Saltbox-style dwelling likely dates to the mid-1800s. Stabilization of the house is included in the long-range plans of Friends of Taconic State Park.

33 Valley View Road: Iron Master's House

This Greek Revival style house (take note of the symmetrical facade, the low-pitched roof, the triangular pediment over the porch, and the columns) was built for Isaac Chesbrough in the mid-19th century. Chesbrough married one of Lemuel Pomeroy's daughters and served as one of the first ironmasters at the Iron Works. It was he who later sold the Iron Works to Frederick Miles.



*Clockwise from top left:
 Copake Falls Train Depot (in operation
 from 1852–1976); Church of St. John
 in the Wilderness; a train pulling into
 the Copake Falls Depot; Keating's New
 York Store, which included the Copake
 Iron Works Post Office; Copake Falls'
 one-room schoolhouse (still standing on
 Rt. 22)*



261 Rt. 344: Church of St. John in the Wilderness & Rectory

Lemuel Pomeroy, owner of the Copake Iron Works, gave land as a site for an Episcopal church and New York's Trinity Church provided funds for construction. The church was completed in 1852 and the rectory a year later. Both structures were designed in board-and-batten Greek Revival style by architect Richard Upjohn, who designed Trinity Church in Manhattan and many others across the county. Architectural Historian William H. Pierson, Jr., says "of all the Gothic churches of America none is more subtly conceived and more expressive of the religious tone in America in the nineteenth century than Upjohn's magnificent church" in Copake Falls. The church interior remains largely unchanged and is historically significant. It's worth a visit.

64 Miles Rd: Copake Falls Train Depot

The train station was a game changer for the area. It ensured the financial success of the Iron Works, served the agricultural community, and transported New York City residents for summer retreats in the country. Rail transportation was relatively new in the US when the New York and Harlem Railroad (later New York Central Railroad) was founded in 1832 as one of the nation's first successful railroads. The route grew in stages, first as a Manhattan street railroad, then reaching north past Copake to Chatham by 1852, and thereby helping to solidify the Hudson River Valley as an essential commercial artery in the years before the Civil War. Thanks to the work of mostly unskilled Irish immigrant labor, the Northern US soon benefited from a sprawling network of railroads and canals that enabled goods and people to move more efficiently, linking sites like Copake Falls to the nation's interior and international markets. The original Copake Iron Works station was completed in 1846 but was destroyed by fire and rebuilt in 1905. The railroad became an important employer in the area, creating opportunities for maintenance workers, station managers, engineers, brakemen, and conductors.

Irish immigrants found opportunities and refuge in eastern Columbia County, but they also endured prejudice and discrimination. They left New York City, where jobs and housing were hard to come by because of prejudice and competition, and made their homes among settlers in the Hudson Valley and Taconic Range. However, they did not manage to escape discrimination. In the 1920s they encountered the terrorist organization the Ku Klux Klan, which targeted not only Black and Brown people at that time but also other ethnic and religious groups, Catholics and Jews especially. As a result, some local Catholics found themselves locked out of jobs. Copake Falls resident Sally Fagan recalls being told she could not be hired to teach in nearby Boston Corners because they didn't want to hire a Catholic out of concern the school would be targeted. When New York governor Al Smith ran for president in 1928, the Klan terrorized the local Catholic church, firing guns and yelling that it was Al Smith's church and threatened to bury him there. When the Catholics held summer bazaars at the one-room schoolhouse in Copake Falls (still standing on Route 22), the KKK would sometimes burn a cross behind it.

219 Rt 344: Keating's New York Store

Keating's New York Store was built in the late 1800s by Catherine and John Bain. Thomas Keating, born and raised in Copake Falls, purchased the property in 1894 and opened Keating's New York Store, which he ran until his death in 1926. The Copake Iron Works Post Office, for which Keating was already the postmaster (appointed in 1884), was located in the store. Mr. Keating bought a used hearse to be used as the first ambulance in the area; this led to the eventual formation of the Community Rescue Squad, which still exists today. A note of interest, Thomas Keating was one of the original financial backers of the Copake Telephone Company. After the

death of Thomas Keating, the store was operated by his nephew John Keating, who resided at the Taconic Inn. The store, which was in front and slightly east of the current house on the property, burned down in the early 1940s but the remains of the stone and concrete porch can be seen at the front of the property.

89 Rt. 344: The Barber Shop

The Barber Shop served the iron mine workers and other local residents. The dates this operated as a barber shop are not known but its existence is a good reminder that there were economic opportunities that emerged because of the Iron Works.

108 Route 344: Taconic Wayside Inn

Originally known as the G. Kisselbrock Hotel, the inn was built in 1857. It became the Taconic Inn in 1899 when the property was purchased by new owners Fred and Kathryn Holsapple. Baseball legend Babe Ruth was a frequent visitor. He stayed at the inn and went hunting and played at the ballfield next door – now the site of the Hamlet Apartments. Visitors from New York City and traveling salesmen (some of whom were there to sell goods to the two stores in town) often stayed at the inn. Since 1971, the Cipkowski family has owned and operated the business. They changed the name to the Taconic Wayside Inn. Locals and visitors alike regularly enjoy dining, socializing, and playing pool at the “TI”.

109 Rt. 344: Post Office

Frederick Miles (for whom Miles Road is named) sold this property along with the land behind it to Herbert Weed in 1871. Weed operated a feed store near the train station. In 1927 the site was sold to Delbert Roberts, who built the current building along with his brother William. They opened Roberts General Store, which was in continual operation between 1927 and 1975 (at some point during that time it was taken over by one of Del’s nieces and her husband). In 1976, the US Post Office began operating out of this building.

127 Rt. 344: Keating’s House

Owner and operator of Keating’s Store (previously mentioned) lived in this house, considered at its time to be “one of the finest in the village of Copake Falls.” Keating’s parents – like so many at that time – immigrated from Ireland to the US in the 1840s, spending six weeks on a slow-moving ship before landing in New York City. Eventually the family made their way to Copake. Before running the store, Thomas Keating, in his teens and while also attending school, worked under Frederick Miles at the Iron Works as an assistant bookkeeper. Later he became a salesman and eventually ran the store. Thomas Keating, a Catholic, married Cora Pulver, who was a Methodist. The two lived harmoniously but, as you will see in the next segment, religious harmony was not necessarily universal among the townspeople.

6 Miles Rd: Copake Falls Methodist Episcopal Church

The hamlet’s first church, St. John in the Wilderness Episcopal (see earlier mention), was made possible by the owners of the Iron Works, Lemuel Pomeroy Jr. and his brother-in-law Isaac Chesbrough. When the founders sold the Iron Works in 1861, however, church membership began to dwindle.



*Clockwise from top left:
Customers at Taconic Inn pub;
Taconic Inn (est. 1857, now
Taconic Wayside Inn); Copake
Falls Methodist Episcopal
Church (currently Roeliff Jansen
Historical Society museum);
members of the Copake Falls
baseball team; Roberts General
Store (currently the Copake
Falls Post Office)*



Some local Methodists then began to use the building until they were effectively kicked out sometime in the 1880s when Fanny Pomeroy Chesbrough Peck – a descendant of the Iron Works founders – locked herself inside the church with the only key to keep the Methodists out. The Methodists decided to build their own church nearby, which opened its doors at this site in 1892. It retained an active membership into the 1940s.

Former journalist and local historian Elinor Mettler recalled seeing the Link family walk down from their miner’s house up near the furnace (see earlier mention) to attend church here. The mother “held herself very erect, wore old fashioned clothes, a black hat perched squarely atop of her head” as she solemnly passed by Elinor’s Miles Road summer home on her way to church in the 1930s.

In the 1980s, the town of Copake purchased the building. It became the Roeliff Jansen Historical Society Museum in 1983. The museum is open Saturday and Sunday afternoons from 2–4 pm.



Clockwise from top left: Milking cows in Bash Bish Creek; ice cutters harvesting cakes if ice to keep milk cool for transport; original Sears, Roebuck and Co. kit house catalog (1939); Bash Bish Inn

9 Miles Rd

Frederick Miles owned a large swath of land in Copake Falls and began to parcel off sections in the 1870s. This house – and the others on Miles Road – sits on one of these lots. Built at the turn of the 20th century, the house is a nice example of Stick style architecture (also known sometimes as Eastlake). Stick style houses, which are similar to the Queen Anne style in that the houses tend to emphasize verticality, are differentiated by stickwork ornamentation on the facade in angular or geometric patterns.

Previous residents include the last superintendent of the Copake Falls milk plant, who purchased the home in 1912. The milk plant was located along the railroad tracks south of the depot. Agriculture was the bedrock of the local economy as dairy farming increased in the early twentieth century to meet the growing demand for milk in New York City. The combination

of productive dairy farms and the railroad made it convenient for milk companies like Borden to establish local milk-receiving plants along the train route.

The gray house next door, along Miles Road, was originally the barn connected to this house.

Like much of rural America, Copake Falls did not get electricity until 1920. Before that, in order to keep the milk cool for transport, some local farmers found seasonal work in the winter by cutting ice from the area lakes and ponds and hauling it by teams of horses to the various milk plants in the region. They were paid by the number of cakes of ice they were able to deliver.

12 Miles Rd: Miles House

This is the house that Frederick Miles lived in until he sold the property in 1892 to Arthur and Mary Bruise, another family with a long history in this area (descendants still live in the hamlet). There is little information on when the house was built but, during renovations, newspapers were found that dated back to the 1830s. This is also the house where Elinor Mettler, as a child, watched the Link family walk to the church on the corner.

37 Miles Rd: Sears Kit House

We often think of prefab housing as something new and contemporary. But in the last century, the path-breaking catalog company Sears Roebuck was, among other things, a source of mail-order buildings. They began selling kit houses in 1908 and continued to do so until 1940. In those 32 years, they sold between 70,000-75,000 house kit homes (about six per day), which ranged from elaborate multi-story homes to very simple cottages. This particular home was purchased from a catalog by Marvin Gramlich in 1939 for \$649.00, including delivery. His “Lakeland Summer Cottage, #607” arrived, unassembled, in May 1940 and assembled in the summer of 1940 at a cost of \$110.00. With the additional purchase of a “cabinet oil heater” the total cost of the house was \$772.55 (about \$17,000 in 2023). For decades it served as a summer cabin for members of the Gramlich family before being sold to its current owners in 2007.

This three-season cottage represents another important aspect of our hamlet’s history. Besides being a hub of agriculture and industry, the area has also been a recreational destination for urban New Yorkers looking to escape the city. As the iron industry began to decline in the region, pleasure seekers began to use the train to escape the city. They were able to do so by using the rail line that already existed, reaching the countryside and mountains in just a few hours.

The Bash Bish Inn

Built in 1903, The Bash Bish Inn is an example of the early interest in the area as a recreational escape for New York City residents. Overlooking Bash Bish Brook (now part of the Taconic State Park), the inn was a significant structure with sleeping rooms and bungalows, a formal restaurant, servants’ quarters, a laundry and garage. The inn also became a source of income for area residents. (i.e. one of the Link women was a maid at the Inn). The Bash Bish Inn burned down in 1918, and not long after that the Taconic State Park was founded, which continues to draw cyclists, hikers, fishermen, and weekenders to Copake Falls year round.



Taconic State Park

The Park opened in 1927 and is the oldest state park in the region. The land that makes up the park includes the old Iron Works, as well as land donated by Francis and Ella Masters. The retired wool merchant from New York City fell in love with the area after hearing that it was a wonderful trout fishing site. Fortunately for the rest of us, he had the foresight to protect the land so that others could continue to enjoy the beauty of the area.

The park also includes **Bash Bish Falls**, a beautiful natural feature located in the Massachusetts side of the park, and **Rudd Pond**, roughly 12 miles to the south. The state legislature created the Taconic State Park Commission, with five commissioners overseeing the project. Francis Masters was one of the five, and future president Franklin D. Roosevelt served as chairman.

In 1933, the Civil Conservation Corps (CCC), one of FDR's New Deal agencies, put local men to work to help renovate the park. The work included planting many trees because the area had been depleted during the timber-dependent industrial era of the nineteenth century. The CCC helped to convert a spring-fed 40-foot-deep flooded pit that had been mined for iron ore into the area's favorite swimming hole. Ever since, locals and visitors have continued to enjoy Copake Fall's rich opportunities for swimming, fishing, camping, hiking, and biking.



Clockwise from top: "Slag" – a byproduct of the iron mining process – can be found throughout Copake Falls; Iron Works employee biking in 1901 – 85 years before the Harlem Valley Rail Trail project began; visitors to Bash Bish Falls, 1895; country chores, circa 1950

Greenwich Cabins

The history of the Greenwich Cabins brings together two of the historical threads of Copake Falls discussed previously: immigration and recreation. At the end of the 19th century and into the 20th, reformers established settlement houses designed to provide social services such as healthcare, childcare, education, housing rights, labor activism, and recreation to the poor. Many settlement houses were set up and run by women in urban immigrant neighborhoods in cities like New York, Boston, and Chicago. This was the case for the Greenwich House, which was founded in 1902 in New York City's Greenwich Village by Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch. Incorporated that year as the Cooperative Social Settlement Society of New York it included on its board such esteemed social reformers as Jacob Riis and Felix Adler.

Beginning in the 1930s, the Greenwich House established several children's summer camps, including one in Copake Falls, which opened in 1953. The camp, which was intended to give urban children an opportunity to experience rural life, offered two three-week sessions each summer to NYC children ages 8–12 where children enjoyed swimming, hiking, sports, and music. According to local resident Sharon Powers, whose mother Helen was the camp director, the children sometimes had a difficult time comprehending country life as evidenced when a local resident rode by the camp on horseback and a camper called out: “Did a policeman lend you his horse?” The camp ran for almost forty years, finally closing in 1991. Today the cabins are owned and rented out by the Taconic State Park. Meanwhile, in the city, the Greenwich House continues to provide educational services and summer arts programs, along with mental and behavioral health services.





Left: Greenwich House students preparing to leave New York City for camp in Copake Falls



Clockwise from top left: Boys line up in front of the Greenwich Cabins; campers exploring Bash Bish Creek; outdoor games in front of the cabins



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copakefallsny.com

Visit us online for ongoing information about upcoming events in Copake Falls. To learn more about the history of the hamlet, and to support its natural beauty and historic treasures, please use the QR codes to connect!

*Roe Jan
Historical
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*Friends of
Taconic State
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*Bash Bish
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