

## History of the Town of Fallsburg

Little is known about the earliest white settlers of the town. Their names and the exact dates they located there have not been documented, but it is thought they arrived before the Revolutionary War. They were most likely of Dutch decent and migrated from Ulster County. They probably reached here using an old Indian trail that crossed the Neversink River at Denniston Ford near Glen Wild. Some of these settlers established a small settlement near the ford while others continued north, crossing the Sheldrake Creek, and settled on a ridge east of Kiamesha Lake and Lake Anawana. This settlement was primarily in the Town of Thompson and was completely abandoned during the French and Indian War. A few of the settlers at Denniston Ford, however, were thought to have "braved it out" or only left for a short period of time.

The Neversink River runs from north to south through the Town of Fallsburg and played an important part in its early development. In the late 1780's the valley above the falls in the Neversink River, between what is now Fallsburg and Hasbrouck, became known as having fertile and cheap land. This brought an influx of settlers from Ulster County. They came south from Wawarsing by way of the Chestnut Creek through Grahamsville as well as traveling north by way of Denniston Ford. By 1800, the upper flats along the river were pretty well settled.

The region was primarily a farming community during the first part of the 1800's. Life during this time must have been frugal. The long haul over the mountains to Kingston prevented a lot trade and it sometimes took as long as 90 days for mail to reach Fallsburg from Kingston. When the D & H Canal was opened in 1828 it brought a change to the area. Now the nearest place to trade was in Ellenville. Up until this time Hasbrouck had been the major settlement in the area. The upper Neversink River between Woodbourne and Hasbrouck was the heaviest settled because of the rich flatlands there along the river. A number of sawmills and gristmills were built there in the 1790's further establishing the area. The settlement at Hasbrouck was named in honor of Anthony Hasbrouck, a wealthy and prominent man who settled there in the early 1800's. Mr. Hasbrouck lived in the old stone house that is still standing today. The hamlet was a major business area for many years with a variety of shops and stores and had its own post office from 1846 to 1923.

After the D & H Canal was built in 1827 settlers in the Town of Fallsburg only had to go to Ellenville to trade instead of the long haul to Kingston. The closest settlement in the town to Ellenville and the D & H Canal was Woodbourne. Up until this time Woodbourne had not been an important hamlet but that was soon going to change. Woodbourne was given its name by Gabriel Ludlam. In 1830, Mr. Ludlum had the foresight to see the advantage of Woodbourne's location to Ellenville and moved himself and his law practice there from Hasbrouck. He was an ambitious man who had great ideas for the area. Although he fulfilled few of his goals, others later achieved them. Soon after the tanning industry was started in Sullivan County. In 1831, Mr. Austin Strong built a tannery at Woodbourne. Mr. Strong went into partnership with Medad T. Morse who later became the sole proprietor. The tannery would be the center of life in the village for 35 years until it burned in 1866. The hamlet of Woodbourne had the largest population in the Town of Fallsburg in the 1870's when the railroad commenced.

The first tannery in the Town of Fallsburg was located at the falls. This area had already been a center of industry for some time. The channel and falls in the Neversink at Fallsburg provided an abundance of waterpower to run the many mills that were built there. Thomas Lockwood bought out many of the early investors and builders at the falls. He owned and operated five grist and saw mills and could be considered the "Father of the Town of Fallsburg." Mr. Lockwood not only did a lot to promote the area around the falls but also worked hard toward the establishment of the town. Many referred to Neversink Falls as Lockwood Mills. When the Town of Fallsburg was formed, it was suggested it should be named after Mr. Lockwood. However, he declined the honor believing the town should be named after the naturally beautiful falls.

In 1832, Rufus Palen opened the first tannery at the falls. He later went into partnership with his cousin, the oil and railroad magnate, Nicholas Flagler. Palen and Flagler's Tannery continued to operate for nearly forty years. The tanneries and other industries in the area provided a great deal of employment and made a big economic impact in the area.

This takes care of the early settlements along the Neversink River in the Town of Fallsburg. The areas in the town away from the river and its industries were slower to develop. In 1794, Joseph Divine came into the area from Ulster County becoming the first settler in the Divine Corners, Loch Sheldrake area. He bought a large tract of land and was the only person to live in that area for several years. Although Divine Corners got off to a slow start, by 1870 it had become a prominent community with a variety of shops and businesses. A post office was established there in 1880 that continued operation until 1967.

Henry D. Schoonmaker arrived in Divine Corners as early as 1805. Shortly after this, he bought property at Sheldrake and became so well known for his developments there that the area was first known as the Schoonmaker Settlement. Sheldrake Lake and Sheldrake Stream were named after the ducks in the area. The

community and the lake later became Loch Sheldrake. Loch Sheldrake did not develop into an important community until the railroad depot opened in nearby Hurleyville.

As stated before, the area of Denniston Ford was one of the first places to be settled in the Town of Fallsburg. There were settlers already there in the 1790's when the influx of new pioneers came up the Sandburg Trail. Some of these newcomers stayed in the area by the ford. Archibald Denniston arrived there around 1815. He came from a prominent Orange County family and the area around the ford soon carried his family name. The Denniston Ford area might have had an early start but the only community to develop in the region was at Glen Wild.

In 1805, Johannis Miller, another influential man from Orange County, bought a large tract of land east of Denniston Ford. He had visions of developing his landholdings into an important village with an impressive residence on one hill and churches, a court house, and other significant structures on other rises. Unfortunately, the Jones brothers of Monticello beat him to his dream and Mr. Miller returned to Orange County a disappointed man. Much of his real estate holdings were in the Town of Fallsburg and the area was known as Miller Settlement. It was later named Glen Wild.

The areas of Hurleyville, Mountaindale and Woodridge were generally underdeveloped until the railroad established depots at these places. Mountaindale, or Sandburg as it was known until 1880, was the most settled area of the three. One of the original inhabitants, Steve Porter, built a house there in 1807 and was followed by many of his friends. However, the population did not grow significantly until after 1835. By the 1850's there were four sawmills and a large tannery in the area that provided considerable employment.

Hurleyville was named after an old hunter, William Hurley, who was the first settler of the area. He believed the location of his property would one day be along an important county road. However, he was mistaken and the major county roadways bypassed his holdings. His house was the only one located in this isolated area for many years. Mr. Hurley's name remained and his vision of the area becoming an important area became a reality many years later when the railroad line ran through the hamlet.

There seems to be little history to write about Woodridge, first called Centreville, before the railroad was built. It was an area of large farms. It was barely mentioned in "The Gazetteer and Business Directory of Sullivan County" published in 1873 and neither Centreville nor Hurleyville was noted on an 1856 map of Sullivan County.