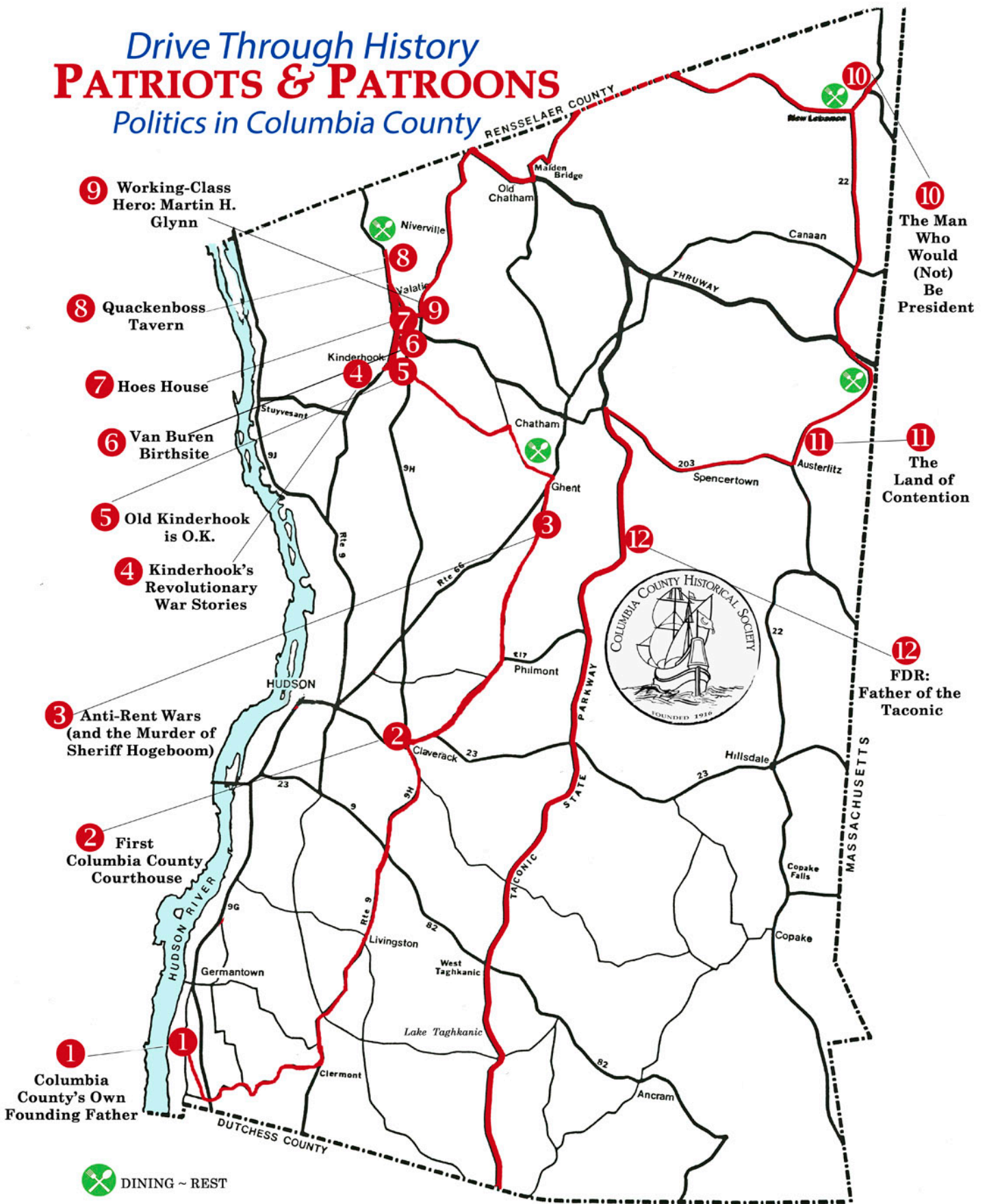


# Drive Through History

## PATRIOTS & PATROONS

### Politics in Columbia County



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## Patriots & Patroons: Politics in Columbia County

In January 1972, the *Chatham Courier* published an article with the following lede: “The annals of Columbia County history are replete with the names of men who have played important roles on their country’s political stage.” No truer words have been spoken! From a drafter of the Declaration of Independence to the eighth President of the United States, this county has produced more than its fair share of political luminaries. But there are more stories, too. For instance, did you know that technically two Columbia County natives were elected President of the United States—though only one would take office? Or that Alexander Hamilton participated in multiple legal cases of great local import? Buckle up for this bumpy tour of Columbia County’s political past!

### 1 Columbia County’s Own Founding Father

Clermont State Historic Site, 1 Clermont Avenue, Germantown

Start your drive at one of the grandest historic homes in Columbia County, Clermont State Historic Site. To say that its most famous inhabitant, Robert R. Livingston (1746-1813) was Columbia County’s first politician would be false, but he certainly made an indelible mark on the county, the state, and the nation. The grandson of Robert Livingston the Elder, First Lord of Livingston Manor, Robert R. Livingston upheld his family’s prominent position by becoming a lawyer, politician, diplomat, and Founding Father.



In 1776, Livingston was one of five drafters of the Declaration of Independence at the Second Continental Congress. As the first Chancellor of New York, he administered the presidential oath of office to George Washington in 1789. A colleague of Thomas Jefferson (and a fellow Democratic-Republican), Livingston was appointed U.S. Minister to France upon Jefferson’s election as President of the United States in 1801. In this role, Livingston successfully negotiated the Louisiana Purchase.

The Livingston home—which was burned by British forces during the Revolutionary War and rebuilt in the 1780s—remained in the family for four more generations after The Chancellor’s death. The Livingstons, whose vast tract of land in lower Columbia County was granted manor status in 1715 by the English crown, were targets of a rebellion known as the Anti-Rent Wars, which you’ll learn more about on stop #3.



**Directions to Next Stop:** Continue straight on Woods Road, then continue onto County Route 6. Turn right onto NY-9G S., then turn left onto Lasher Road. Take Lasher Road to U.S. 9 N. and turn left. Continue on U.S. 9 N. for 9.5 miles, then slight right onto NY-23 E/NY-9H N. After 1.2 miles, turn left onto Spook Rock Road. Make a right onto Stone Mill Road. When you reach NY-23B, the destination will be in front of you at the intersection of Old Lane.

### 2 The First Columbia County Courthouse

NY-23B at Old Lane, Claverack

Prior to the 19th century, Claverack was the seat of Columbia County. As the newly formed county (and country) began to formalize its government, this Federal-era brick structure was built as Columbia County’s first courthouse. It was only in use for about 20 years, however, as Hudson soon replaced Claverack as the center of county government.



In its short tenure, the courthouse was the stage for several prominent statesmen, including Martin Van Buren and Aaron Burr. The most famous case argued here was the *People vs. Croswell* in 1803, in which Federalist journalist Harry Croswell was criminally charged—and ultimately convicted—for his criticisms of President Thomas Jefferson. But that wasn’t the end of the matter. Croswell appealed his conviction and the case reached the Supreme

Court of New York, where fellow Federalist Alexander Hamilton argued in his defense. Though the jury upheld Croswell's initial conviction, the case became a landmark in the history of United States defamation law.

An interesting footnote: During the appeal, Hamilton stayed with a friend in Albany. Over dinner one evening, he made bitter remarks about Aaron Burr that were repeated days before New York's gubernatorial election, which Burr lost. Blaming his defeat on Hamilton's remarks, Burr challenged Hamilton to the infamous duel that ended Hamilton's life. The courthouse has since been converted to housing, and in 1998 it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

**Directions to Next Stop:** Head east on NY-23B; continue onto NY-23 E. Slight left onto NY-217 E. Continue for 3.5 miles, then turn left onto Mellenville Road (County Road 9). In 2.5 miles, the cemetery will be on your left.

### 3 Anti-Rent Wars (and the Murder of Sheriff Hogeboom)

Ghent Union Cemetery, County Road 9, Ghent


Early European settlers like the Livingston family, as well as early Dutch patroons such as the Van Rensselaers, owned vast tracts of land in Columbia County which operated similar to Europe's feudal system. For generations, these wealthy landowners leased small parcels to farmers who, unable to obtain land of their own and realize the freedom the New World promised, chafed under the oppressive system.

That resentment grew into the Anti-Rent Wars, a tenant's revolt which took place throughout Columbia, Rensselaer, Albany, and Greene counties. One of the first flashpoints was the murder of Sheriff Cornelius Hogeboom, a Revolutionary War vet who was ambushed while serving an eviction notice in Hillsdale in 1791. The attackers disguised themselves as Indians, a common ruse employed by the Anti-Renters. The suspects were arrested and charged with Hogeboom's murder, but all were acquitted. Sheriff Hogeboom lies in rest at Ghent Union Cemetery.



Photo Credit: Fred Saar

The Anti-Rent Wars intensified in the mid-1800s when Dr. Smith A. Boughton, known as "Big Thunder," became the leading voice of the rebellion. His fiery speeches railing against landlords drew hundreds, and "Down Rent!" became the rallying cry of the movement. The wars ended more or less with triumph for the tenants; in 1846, the state legislature passed laws to end the patroon system and the tenants were given title to their holdings. The remaining manors soon dissolved..

 **Bartlett House** (2258 NY-66) is located in a beautifully restored 19<sup>th</sup>-century hotel in the heart of Ghent, and serves upscale breakfast, lunch, and dinner (check the restaurant for hours).

### 4 Kinderhook's Revolutionary War Stories

While no Revolutionary War battles were fought in Columbia County, Kinderhook was a transportation crossroads, which made it the site of several historic events during the American Revolution.

**Colonel Henry Knox** transported artillery through the village on horse-drawn wooden sledges en route from Ticonderoga to Boston in the winter of 1776-1776 (a historic marker commemorates the route, at Hudson Avenue and U.S. 9 in the village square). **British General John Burgoyne** was held as a prisoner of war at the elegant home now called the Burgoyne House (24 Broad St.) after his defeat at the Second Battle of Saratoga.



Benedict Arnold

The hero of that same battle was none other than **Benedict Arnold**, who helped score a few key wins for the Patriots before becoming America's most famous turncoat in 1780. Just down the street from where Burgoyne was being held, Arnold spent the night in an elegant brick home at 28 Broad Street, now known as the "Benedict Arnold House."

**Directions to Next Stop:** Stick around Kinderhook Village for a tour of Martin Van Buren's early years.



## Martin Van Buren's Formative Years

Village of Kinderhook (Various Locations)

The most famous political figure from Columbia County is undoubtedly Martin Van Buren. But before he became America's eighth president, Van Buren came of age and plied his trade around the Village of Kinderhook in the years following the Revolution.



### 5 Old Kinderhook is O.K.

A term you've used a million times and probably never thought much about: Van Buren's presidency helped introduce "O.K." into the American lexicon. Some sources speculate that O.K. began as an abbreviation of "orl korrekt" (a Dutch variation on "all correct"), then took on a double meaning as it was used as a slogan during Van Buren's (unsuccessful) reelection campaign of 1840, as an abbreviation of "Old Kinderhook."

### 6 Van Buren Birthsite, Hudson Street at Jarvis Lane

Van Buren was the first American-born U.S. president—that is, he was the first president born not a British subject. He is also the only American president whose first language was not English (like many descendants of Dutch settlers in the Hudson Valley, Van Buren grew up speaking Dutch). Though the original house no longer stands, this site at Hudson Avenue and Jarvis Lane in the heart of Kinderhook is thought to be Van Buren's birthplace, December 5, 1782.



### 7 Hoes House, River Street, Valatie (look for the blue marker on the left)

The Hoes family were some of the earliest settlers of Valatie. This was the home of Marie Hoes, the mother of Martin Van Buren. Her son visited often.



Hoes House, c.1760

### 8 Quackenboss Tavern, U.S. Route 9 N., Kinderhook

Van Buren's father ran a tavern (no longer existing), where young Martin learned how to interact with people from all walks of life—a skill that came in handy throughout his legal and political career. So the old Quackenboss Tavern must have felt somewhat familiar when he tried a case here in the early 1800s. This tavern—which was heralded as one of the best inns south of Albany—was also where commissioners deliberated for two months in 1783 on how to divide the great Kinderhook patent of 1686 among its grantees.

After Van Buren's presidency ended, he retired to Lindenwald, now the **Martin Van Buren National Historic Site**. Here, he mounted several unsuccessful attempts at a political comeback. Still, he considered these years the happiest of his life, as "a farmer in my native town." He is buried at **Kinderhook Reformed Church Cemetery**, on Albany Avenue.



The Quackenboss Tavern may not serve grog any longer, but you can sample homegrown spirits just up the street at **Harvest Spirits at Golden Harvest Farms** (3074 U.S. 9, Valatie). Don't forget to pick up an apple cider donut; after all, donuts were brought to New York by Dutch settlers!

**Directions to Next Stop:** From U.S. 9 N., turn onto Main Street (NY-203) to enter the Village of Valatie. Turn left onto Church Street. Look for the gazebo on the right.

## 9 Working Class Hero: Martin H. Glynn

Martin H. Glynn Village Square, Church Street, Valatie

In Valatie, another famous “Martin” emerged from humble beginnings and rose to the national political stage. Born 1871 to Irish immigrants who had fled the Great Famine, Martin H. Glynn was a New York governor who railed against the corruption of Tammany Hall. Growing up above his family’s Main Street saloon, he showed intellectual promise from an early age and eventually graduated from Fordham University as valedictorian. He entered the political arena early, and was the youngest member of the U.S. Congress when he was elected in 1899.



In 1912, Glynn became the lieutenant governor to Governor William Sulzer. However, the Tammany Hall corruption he opposed soon engulfed his administration. Glynn reached the governor’s seat only after Sulzer was impeached at the behest of “Boss” Charles Murphy; caught between the instruments of power and his own progressive ideals, Glynn opted not to condemn Boss Murphy’s actions. Though he attempted to reignite his “progressive zeal” as governor, he never overcame the perception that he had been party to the impeachment. He lost his bid for reelection in 1914. Notably, Glynn was the first Catholic governor of New York.

Glynn never again held public office, but his reputation as an orator grew. At the Democratic National Convention in 1916, he delivered a keynote which gave incumbent President Woodrow Wilson the slogan for his reelection: “He kept us out of war.” (However, the U.S. would enter World War I the following year.) Glynn died in 1924 of a self-inflicted gunshot wound, having suffered throughout his adult life from chronic back pain caused by a spinal injury.

**Directions to Next Stop:** Head east on Main Street, and continue onto County Road 28A for about 3 miles. Turn left onto Harris Road, then continue onto NY-66. Follow the signs for NY-66 for just over 7 miles, then turn right onto NY-20. Drive for just over 9 miles, then turn left onto NY-22 North. Turn left onto Kline Lane at the signs for Cemetery of the Evergreens.

## 10 The Man Who Would (Not) Be President

Samuel J. Tilden Gravesite

Cemetery of the Evergreens, 382 Cemetery Road, New Lebanon

New Lebanon native Samuel J. Tilden was once one of America’s top political stars, and cut his teeth as a protégé of President Martin Van Buren. Much like Glynn, Tilden ran for Governor of New York on a platform of political reform and won, thanks in part to his popularity for taking on “Boss” Tweed and the notoriously corrupt Tammany Hall.



In 1876, Tilden was nominated to the Democratic ticket of the 1876 U.S. Presidential Election. He entered the race as the favorite against Ohio Republican Rutherford B. Hayes, and indeed won a majority (50.9%) of the popular vote; however, disputes in four states left Tilden one electoral vote shy of a majority. Ultimately, Hayes was declared the winner by a specially appointed electoral commission—a decision accepted by Democrats during the Compromise of 1877 in exchange for the end of Reconstruction in the South. To this day, Tilden is the only presidential candidate to win an outright majority of the popular vote, but lose the election.

He is buried at Cemetery of the Evergreens. His gravestone, in reference to the 1876 election, reads: “I Still Trust the People.”



There are several great restaurants in the New Lebanon area offering takeout. Grab brunch or lunch from **Blueberry Hill Market Cafe** (515 Route 20), a hearty lunch or dinner of burgers and BBQ ribs from **The K Shack** (9 Tilden Road), or roast beef sandwiches from **Kendall House** (423 Route 20), which also doubles as an antique store.

**Directions to Next Stop:** Head south on NY-22 until you reach Austerlitz. From here, you can either turn onto NY-203 to continue on to the Taconic State Parkway, or stop for a hike at Harvey Mountain State Forest.

## 11 The Land of Contention

Harvey Mountain State Forest  
564 Hill Road, Austerlitz

Driving south from New Lebanon on Route 22 you'll pass through the beautiful town of Austerlitz, once a subject of such turmoil that it was called the "land of contention" by one traveler in 1759.

The troubles began when a group of 75 New England settlers purchased a deed from two Indians. Problem was, the powerful Van Rensselaer family already claimed ownership of the entire area under a 1629 patent. Meanwhile, New York and Massachusetts couldn't agree on the location of the state border. Tensions erupted between the settlers and British troops during a series of uprisings called the Great Rebellion of 1766 (a precursor to the later Anti-Rent Wars) and the conflict continued through the Revolutionary War—that is, until Alexander Hamilton became involved in yet another Columbia County legal affair. Acting as attorney for the Van Rensselaers (of whom Hamilton's wife, Eliza, was a descendant), Hamilton negotiated a "happy end" to the disputes that allowed the settlers to purchase their adopted land from the Van Rensselaers. The case would be one of Hamilton's last, as he was killed by Aaron Burr less than three months later.



Photo Credit: AllTrails.com

By the way, Austerlitz is named after the Battle of Austerlitz, which is known as one of Napoleon's great victories. The name was suggested by none other than Martin Van Buren, then a New York State Senator, who was an ardent admirer of Napoleon.



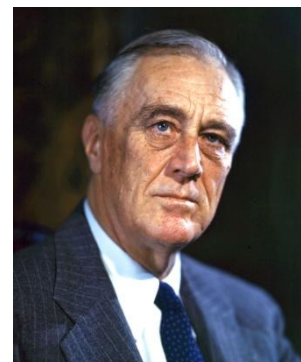
If you'd like to stretch your legs and take in the beauty that all of these entities were fighting over, make time for a hike at **Harvey Mountain State Forest**. You may come across old stone walls—leftovers from New England farmers who once worked and lived on this land. Near the summit of Harvey Mountain is a wild blueberry field, which historically provided a source of revenue for area residents.

**Directions to Next Stop:** Turn right onto NY-23 and continue for 7.7 miles until you reach the Taconic State Parkway.

## 12 FDR: Father of the Taconic

Taconic State Parkway

Franklin D. Roosevelt, who grew up in neighboring Dutchess County, had long dreamed of a scenic road through the eastern Hudson Valley that would give city-dwelling New Yorkers access to the beautiful parks of the region. As Chairman of the Taconic State Park Commission—a position he held prior to being elected Governor of New York in 1928—FDR set that dream in motion with the creation of the Taconic State Parkway. At that time, parkways were a new concept, though automobiles had already become the dominant form of transportation. New York City was growing crowded due to booming immigration and industrialization, and its denizens were increasingly in need of a means of retreat.



The road was designed by landscape architect Gilmore Clarke, and is now celebrated for the way it beautifully integrates the surrounding landscapes. Land acquisition and building commenced in 1925, but the Columbia County section was not completed until 1963 (due in part to a lengthy hiatus during and after World War II). An opening ceremony was scheduled for November 25, 1963, but was canceled due to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy three days earlier. As Chairman of the Taconic State Park Commission, Franklin D. Roosevelt also gave **Taconic State Park** to the people of New York.

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