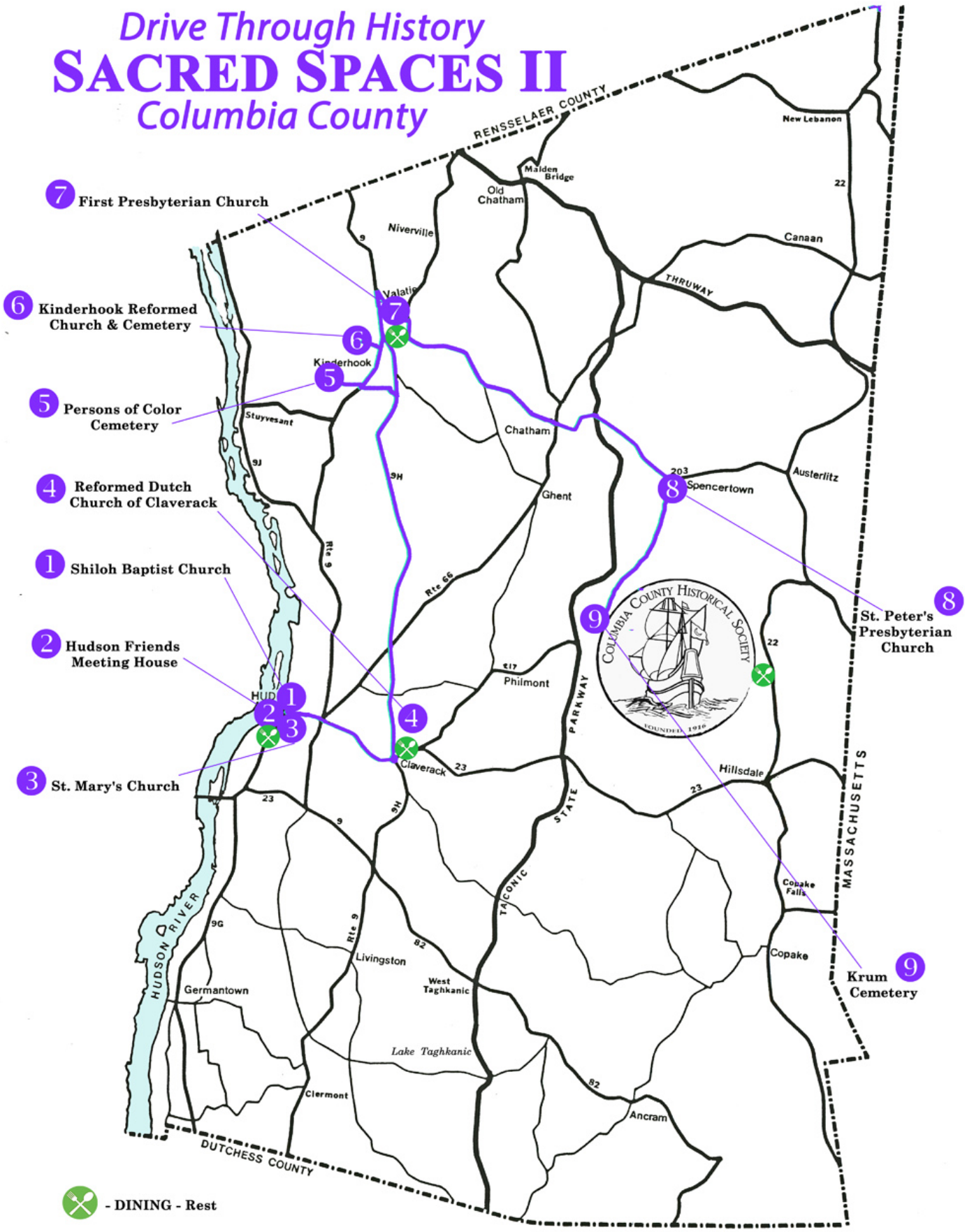
Drive Through History
SACRED SPACES II
Columbia County



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COLUMBIA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Sacred Spaces (Part II)

As Dutch immigrants settled northern Columbia County in the late 1600s, the Reformed church was the first Christian denomination to take firm root in this part of the County. Soon thereafter, other immigrant groups began arriving with their own faiths: Congregationalists from New England, Presbyterians from Great Britain, Quakers from Dutchess County and Nantucket, and eventually Roman Catholics and Jews from points throughout Europe. Their legacies live on at these historically significant sacred spaces, which preserve not just the religious traditions, but the cultural and social life of these diverse communities.

*Locations with an asterisk are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

❶ Shiloh Baptist Church

14 Warren Street, Hudson

If you've ever wondered why this Baptist church bears the Star of David, it's because the building contains the histories of not one, but two significant congregations in Hudson. Between 1907 and 1913, the building was erected to house the Congregation Anshe Emeth, one of Hudson's earliest synagogues. That congregation was formed by 40 Jewish families in 1885, and its original place of worship was on Diamond Street (now Columbia Street). In 1966, the congregation built a new synagogue on Joslen Boulevard and sold their space on Warren Street to Shiloh Baptist Church. That congregation was established in 1915, and has been an important religious and social institution for Hudson's Black community for over a century. Before their move to this building, the congregation worshipped at 241 Columbia Street, a building now known as the Old Shiloh Baptist Church.

On your way to the next stop, swing by **Kitty's** (60 S. Front Street) to grab breakfast sandwiches and "Travelling Hashbrowns" for your journey.

Directions to Next Stop: Head southeast on Warren Street, then turn right onto 2nd Street. Turn left on Union Street. In .3 miles, the destination will be on the right.

❷ Hudson Friends Meeting House

343 Union Street, Hudson

In the late 1700s, New England whalers brought the Quaker religion to Hudson when they moved their maritime business here from Nantucket. This tiny, one-room house sandwiched between two taller buildings on narrow Union Street was built by Orthodox Quakers in 1828. The meeting was "laid down" 40 years later, then revived in the 1950s. Quaker meetings are self-guided and held in silence that is only broken when worshippers are moved to speak. Long benches are positioned in a square facing the center of the room. The benches in this meeting house bear carvings of whaling ships and other nautical symbols—presumed to be the handiwork of young Quakers in the meeting's early years.

Directions to Next Stop: Head southeast on Union Street, then turn right onto S. 5th Street. S. 5th Street turns right and becomes East Allen Street. At the end of the block, the destination will be on your left.

❸ St. Mary's Church / Holy Trinity Parish

429 East Allen Street, Hudson

Easily one of the most dramatic church edifices in the region, St. Mary's Church is one of Columbia County's original Roman Catholic congregations.

Though most of Hudson's New England proprietors were of the Quaker faith, a small group, including Thomas Jenkins, were Catholic. In the late 1700s, Jenkins purchased a tract bordering the Hudson River and formed Hudson's first Catholic community, consisting of about 20 worshippers; few records remain, though missionaries and visiting French priests likely ministered to the congregation.

A dedicated pastorate was established in the 1840s under Father Michael Gilbride; his successor, Father William Howard, oversaw the construction of Hudson's first brick-and-mortar Catholic church, at 3rd and Montgomery streets. By 1872, the congregation had grown to more than 500 members, and in 1930 the present gothic structure was built to accommodate the swell of worshippers. In 1950, the original church was destroyed by a fire. Holy Trinity Parish was founded in 2009 as the merging of three ecclesiastical communities, including St. Mary's.

Directions to Next Stop: Head north on Union Street, then turn left onto 6th Street. Turn right onto Columbia Street. This becomes Columbia Turnpike/NY-23B. Drive for approximately 3.5 miles, then turn left onto NY-9H.
The church will be on your right.

❹ The Reformed Dutch Church of Claverack*

88 NY-9H, Claverack

Since 1767, this church has occupied a place of great importance in Claverack—socially, spiritually, architecturally and culturally. Faced with brick and donning a gambrel roof typical of the Dutch style, the church features a soaring bell tower standing on legs of fluted Doric columns. Encompassing around 15 acres, its expansive cemetery contains no less than the history of the Dutch settlement of this part of the County.

The congregation first formed in 1716, and an earlier church stood near the First Columbia County Courthouse on Route 23B. In 1767, the present church was built on land dedicated by John Van Rensselaer. Until 1826, Rev. John Gabriel Gebhard presided over the church, and his legacy is remembered on marble plaques in the front of the sanctuary. During the Revolutionary War, the church provided a place of respite for weary soldiers. The original structure was modified several times in the 19th century, adding the bell tower, an expanded pulpit and twin entry wings.
It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2001.

Just a few doors down from The Reformed Dutch Church of Claverack, the newly opened **Jackon's** (14 NY-9H) serves BBQ, burgers, chili and all the fixings, with outdoor picnic-table seating.

Directions to Next Stop: Follow NY-9H north for 13 miles. Take the exit for Kinderhook, then turn right onto Hudson Avenue. In downtown Kinderhook, turn left onto Broad Street, then turn right onto Rothermel Lane. The destination will be on your right.

❺ Persons of Color Cemetery*

15 Rothermel Lane, Kinderhook

On a narrow strip of grass next to the baseball diamond at Kinderhook's Village Playground is a somber reminder of a lesser-known aspect of Columbia County's history—a Persons of Color Cemetery, created in 1816 for the burial of Kinderhook's free and enslaved African American population. Shortly before his death in 1815 or 1816, Kinderhook businessman and Irish immigrant John Rogers stipulated in his will that a small plot of his land be used to establish of a free burial ground for Blacks. Rogers, a white slaveowner, seems to have had a complicated relationship with race; he freed his own slave, Harry, at his "will and pleasure," though the manumission did not take effect until Rogers' death.

During the 1700s and 1800s until the abolition of slavery in 1827, Kinderhook had the largest enslaved population in Columbia County. The Federal census of 1790 enumerated 638 slaves in Kinderhook out of 1,623 in the County—ranking it among the rural towns in New York with the highest share of slaveowners. By about 1875, the cemetery was used until "every available inch was taken up," according to *A History of Old Kinderhook* (Collier, 1914), with "coffin placed upon coffin" in some cases. The cemetery comprises 15 simple headstones, but may contain as many as 500 unmarked graves. For many years it languished in disrepair, the stones tipped and grown over with sod. Following an effort by citizens of Kinderhook to restore the graves, the cemetery was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2016.

Directions to Next Stop: Head back to Broad Street and turn left. The destination will be on your right.

❻ Kinderhook Reformed Church and Cemetery

21 Broad Street, Kinderhook

In his *History of Columbia County, New York* (1878), Capt. Franklin Ellis identifies the Reformed Dutch Church of Kinderhook as the oldest religious body in Columbia County, having formed between the years 1677 and 1700. "Earnest religious feeling was a marked characteristic of the early Dutch immigrants," he wrote. "With them settlement and religious organization were usually almost simultaneous."

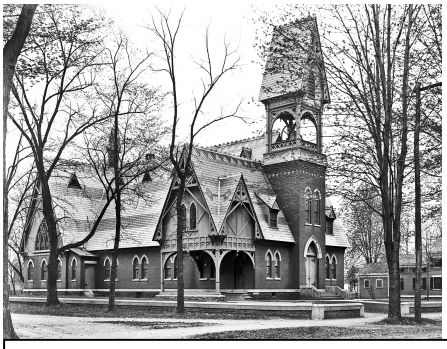
In those early days, settlers in the frontier town of Kinderhook received periodic preaching from traveling dominies connected to the Dutch Reformed Church of Albany. As settlements grew, permanent congregations were established and churches built. The first church in Kinderhook was put up in the late 1600s, then replaced in 1717. A third, built in 1814 where the present church stands, was badly damaged by a fire in 1867. The church that stands today was built in 1869.

Now, head to Albany Avenue to visit the Reformed Church cemetery, which antedates the present church structure. (Turn left onto Albany Avenue at the main intersection, and the cemetery will be on your right in ¾ miles). In stark contrast with the Persons of Color Cemetery, this verdant and tree-shaded cemetery is where many of Kinderhook's most prominent citizens lie in repose, including President Martin Van Buren and his wife, Hannah, and U.S. congressmen Peter Silvester and Lewis Kirby Rockefeller.

Directions to Next Stop: Return to the main intersection and turn left onto U.S. 9 N/Chatham Street. In 1.6 miles, turn right onto Main Street. Turn left onto Church Street and follow it to the top of the hill. The church will be on your right.

7 First Presbyterian Church*

3212 Church Street, Valatie



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Go from Dutch to Deutsch at this 1878 church, which was designed to resemble an ancient German cathedral. The Presbyterian Church of Valatie grew out of a schism in the Kinderhook Reformed Dutch Church; the new congregation was organized in 1835, and its first house of worship was a simple wood-frame building on Upper Main Street which later housed the Valatie Opera House. As Valatie prospered in the second half of the 19th century, church leaders set upon a plan to build a grander sanctuary at the top of Zion Hill—the name given to this high spot in the village where several other churches already stood. All but this church have since been torn down.

With the backing of several wealthy congregants, the firm of Ogden & Wright of Albany was hired to design the church. Its striking edifice, designed in the High Victorian Gothic Revival style, is made of brick trimmed with blue limestone, topped with a polychrome slate roof. The fine finishes and details included stained glass windows from New York City, carved ash and black walnut interiors, and brass sconces lighted by gas manufactured on the premises. The church was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.

Continuing the German theme, choose from 14 German-style beers on tap at **Reifenberg Brewing** (3201 Main Street) and order a pint, a flight or a growler to-go. For a snack, pop into one of five restaurants on Main Street.

Directions to Next Stop: Head south on Church Street, then turn left onto Main Street. At the bridge, turn right onto NY-203 and drive for 10.4 miles. Once you reach Spencertown, the destination will be on your right.

8 St. Peter's Presbyterian Church*

5219 County Road 7, Spencertown

This quintessential country church in the heart of Spencertown predates the American Revolution, and its cemetery contains the graves of many Revolutionary veterans. In contrast with the Dutch communities of Kinderhook and Claverack, Spencertown was settled by a group of Connecticut farmers around 1750. For that reason, the church has a distinctly New England aesthetic.

In 1760 the town's proprietors voted to establish a church. Jesse Clark became its first minister. Services were held at private homes until the church was built, in 1771, by a local carpenter named William Babcock. Interrupted by the war, the church was formally dedicated in 1803. It was originally built across the road from its present location; in 1826, it was moved and modified with Federal-era stylistic additions.

St. Peter's began as a primarily Congregationalist church, with some Anglicans and Presbyterians in attendance. Later, a dedicated Congregationalist church was formed and St. Peter's changed its denomination to Presbyterian. In 1826, a woman named Lilla Van Buren became the church's first African-American member—making St. Peter's one of the first integrated churches in the County, if not the nation. It was listed to the National Register in 2002.

Directions to Next Stop: Continue southeast on County Road 7/South Street for .9 miles, then continue onto Crow Hill Road for 3.4 miles. Turn right onto County Route 21, and in .6 miles turn left onto Harlemville Road.
The destination will be on your right in 1.9 miles.

❾ Krum Cemetery

Harlemville Road at Wolf Hill Road, Hillsdale

Tucked behind a low stone wall in a far-flung corner of Hillsdale, this unmarked cemetery is one of the last reminders of a community that faded out more than 100 years ago. Krum Hollow was founded in 1745 by Martin Krum, an enterprising 17-year-old German immigrant. It was one of the earliest European settlements in Hillsdale, perhaps even the first.

In 1769 Krum initiated a break with the Dutch Reformed Church of Claverack, leading to the formation of a congregation in Krum Hollow made up of his fellow dissenters, a mix of Dutch Reformed and German Lutherans. With the church at its center, Krum Hollow thrived for a quarter-century. Church records show 536 baptisms between 1775 and 1800, followed by a sharp drop off as families began moving away in search of better farming.

The Krum church is long gone, but the cemetery keeps its memory. Among the more than 100 graves, you can find one of Krum Hollow's first burials (Johann Gotfried Schumacher, a Revolutionary War soldier who perished in 1782) and its last (a two-week-old nameless infant who died in 1851).

Good farmland may have been scarce in this part of Hillsdale, but apples are in steady supply. Head to **Little Apple Cidery** (178 Orchard Lane) to sip homemade hard cider in the midst of a peaceful, family-owned orchard. To get there, head east on Wolf Hill Road for 3.6 miles, then turn left onto Hunt Road; in 1.7 miles, turn left onto Orchard Lane and the cidery will be just ahead on the left.

Be sure to download Sacred Spaces, Part I to explore historic churches and cemeteries on the Roeliff Jansen region.

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