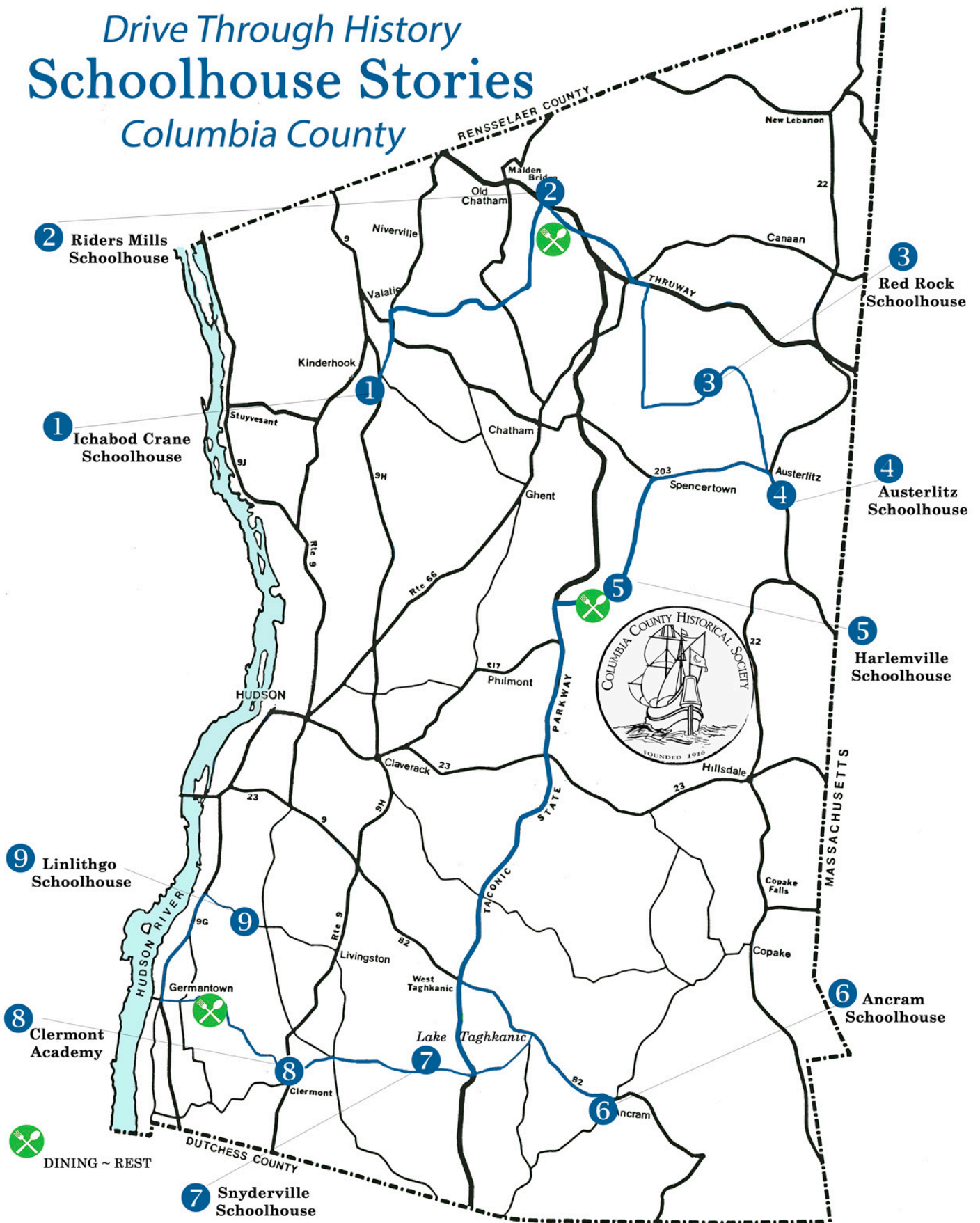


# Drive Through History Schoolhouse Stories Columbia County



## Schoolhouse Stories

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, one-room schoolhouses were the heart of American education. In Columbia County alone there were more than 100 school districts, each with its own single-room schoolhouse. A gradual shift toward today's centralized school districts began in the 1920s, although many families strongly preferred the tight-knit, family-like learning environment these neighborhood schools provided. The County's last one-room schoolhouse, Taghkanic Schoolhouse District #4, closed in 1965.

Like chalk on a blackboard, traces of that era can still be seen throughout Columbia County. Many schoolhouses have been converted to homes or barns. Some are museum sites. Others are abandoned, barely surviving in a state of near-collapse. But these relics offer a glimpse into a bygone time when teachers boarded with local families, children of all ages helped one another learn, and district schools were a source of immense community pride.

### 1 Ichabod Crane Schoolhouse

2589 NY-9H, Kinderhook

Built in 1850 at the intersection of Route 9H and Fischer Road as the Kinderhook Schoolhouse District #6, this single-room school is now owned and operated as a museum by the Columbia County Historical Society. It replaced an earlier log-cabin school where Jesse Merwin, friend of Washington Irving and inspiration for the iconic Ichabod Crane character in Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, served as schoolmaster. As fellow boarders at the Van Ness estate (now the Martin Van Buren National Historic Site), the two twenty-something intellectuals rode trails, caught fish, and continued their correspondence for more than three decades.



The schoolhouse was moved to its present location after closing in the 1940s, and was later restored to its 1930s appearance. It is an excellent and intact example of a rural, one-room schoolhouse with a gable roof, clapboard siding and a single pent-roofed entrance. The interior consists of a large classroom with two adjacent cloakrooms—one for boys, one for girls—and retains its original 1929 wood stove, wood flooring, chalkboards and sash windows.



Although it is temporarily closed to the public, the Ichabod Crane Schoolhouse welcomes fourth-graders from all over Columbia County and the Capital Region each year for a “*Day of History*,” in which students discover how arithmetic and cursive handwriting were taught in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. “I have very happy recollections of my teacher,” said Rosalind Rutherford Atkinson, who attended Ichabod Crane Schoolhouse from 1925-1931. “Every spring, every fall, she’d take us to the woods for a walk, and she knew every bird and flower.”



In 1952, Eleanor Roosevelt visited the Ichabod Crane Schoolhouse and broadcast a radio show about the Columbia County community, schoolteacher Jesse Merwin, Washington Irving and Ichabod Crane.

You can listen to the broadcast on our website here: [www.cchsny.org/Eleanor\\_Roosevelt](http://www.cchsny.org/Eleanor_Roosevelt)

**Directions to Next Stop:** Head north on Route 9H north. Turn right toward McCagg Road, then turn left onto McCagg Road. Turn left onto Novak Road. Continue straight onto Rod and Gun Club Road. In .5 miles, turn left onto NY-203. Turn right onto Main Street. Continue straight onto County Road 28A/Upper Main Street. In 2.3 miles, turn left onto Harris Road. Continue straight onto NY-66. In 5.6 miles, turn right onto Riders Mills Road, then turn right onto Drowne Road in .6 mile. The destination will be on your right.

## 2 Riders Mills Schoolhouse

112 Riders Mills Road, Old Chatham

This classic “little red schoolhouse” is one of America’s earliest and longest-running public one-room schoolhouses. Built in 1796, the school was fully dependent on local farmers and surrounding mills until it succumbed to centralization in 1953. It was acquired by the Riders Mills Historical Association in 1966 and is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Architect Horace Peaslee, a Malden Bridge native who designed Chatham’s Tracy Memorial Village Hall and several notable buildings in Washington, D.C., considered it one of the “finest examples of an early rural school in the nation,” and was instrumental in having the school’s plans added to the Library of Congress archives. It is one of only two known early schoolhouses with a barrel-shaped ceiling (the other is in Williamsburg, VA). According to Carrie Coffin Presson, a student at the school in the 1870s: “The desks were long painted-board tables with nearby benches for seats. You speak of lights, I think all we had was what the Lord gave us—daylight and sunlight.”



**Old Chatham Country Store & Café** (639 Albany Turnpike, Old Chatham) is a great place to stop for breakfast, coffee, lunch or grab-and-go grocery items to bring along on your drive. To get there, continue on Drowne Road for .5 mile and turn left onto Pitts Road. Make a right onto Howes Road, then turn left onto Albany Turnpike. In 1.7 miles, the café will be on the right.

**Directions to Next Stop:** From Old Chatham, continue east on Albany Turnpike for 3.1 miles, then turn right onto County Road 9 S/Tompkins Street. In 3.3 miles, continue straight onto County Road 24. You can drive by the schoolhouse, or park at the **Red Rock Historical Society** (401 County Road 24) and walk to get a closer look.

## 3 Red Rock Schoolhouse

County Road 24 at Schoolhouse Road, Red Rock

Heading east on County Road 24, just before you reach Schoolhouse Road, look to your left and you’ll be able to make out an abandoned white schoolhouse on a steep forested bluff. This is the former Canaan District #2 Schoolhouse, built in 1829. The school is currently owned by the Red Rock Historical Society, which hopes to restore the building in the future. Charlie Briggs, former president of the RRHS and a former student at the schoolhouse, recalled this about attending the school in 1928: “We used to slide down that hill right onto the road. Of course there weren’t any cars then, just the occasional horse and wagon.”



Visitors wishing to get a closer look may park at the Red Rock Historical Society, which is housed in a beautiful c.1829 church at 401 County Road 24, then walk approximately .3 miles east. Please be careful of traffic, as the shoulder is narrow. (Note: The Red Rock Historical Society shares a parking lot with the Red Rock Volunteer Fire Co.)

**Directions to Next Stop:** Continue east on County Road 24 for 1.2 miles, then turn right onto County Route 5. After 3 miles, turn right onto NY-22 S. The next site will be on your right in approximately 1.4 miles.

## 4 Austerlitz Schoolhouse

Austerlitz Historical Society, 11550 NY-22, Austerlitz

(Note: School is located on the west side of NY-22, next to the white church)

Another little red schoolhouse, this one-room school was built around 1814 and educated students until 1955. In the 1890s, the school was moved several yards south to its current location to make way for a private horse trotting track, according to the Austerlitz Historical Society, which now owns the schoolhouse.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the average class size here was around 20.

Water came from a well behind the schoolhouse, heat was supplied by a coal-burning stove, and there were two outdoor toilets behind the building. Although the teachers were known for running a tight ship, children were given daily recess to play games such as “kick the wicket,” “sheep pole down” and “killyiover.”

**Directions to Next Stop:** Drive north on NY-22 for 1 mile, then turn left onto NY-203. In 3.9 miles, sharp left onto South Street. In .9 mile, continue onto Crow Hill Road. Continue for 3.4 miles, then turn right onto County Route 21. In 1.1 miles, the destination will be on your right.



## 5 Harlemville Schoolhouse

1198 County Route 21, Ghent

Sitting on a one-acre lot at the corner of Route 21 and Harlemville Road, the old Harlemville Schoolhouse was built in 1842. Following extensive renovations (and a cheerful new paint job), the building now welcomes a new generation of learners as the Art School of Columbia County. Established in 2013, the school provides free and affordable fine art programming to children, teens, adults and seniors in need, serving around 1,800 members of the community each year. Before ASCC took ownership, the school had been a private home and later a bookstore.



Just around the corner from the Harlemville Schoolhouse is **Hawthorne Valley**, pioneers in both biodynamic farming and education. The Hawthorne Valley Waldorf School (K-12) embodies the teaching philosophies of Rudolf Steiner, who emphasized hands-on, holistic learning, while the farm also offers adult farm training and education. Stop by the **Hawthorne Valley Farm Store** for lunch or snacks to-go.

**Directions to Next Stop:** Head west on County Route 21, then get on the Taconic State Parkway heading south and travel for 11.6 miles. Take Exit 80 for NY-82 toward Hudson/Ancram. Turn right onto NY-82 S. In 6.8 miles, turn right onto County Road 7. In .2 miles, the destination will be on your right.



## 6 Ancram Schoolhouse

County Route 7, Ancram (just west of St. Johns Church)

**NOTE: This schoolhouse is now a private home. Please respect the homeowner's privacy and do not approach the property.**

Remarkably, all of Ancram's one-room schoolhouses still stand, and all have been converted to private homes. This fine example, which was built around 1840, operated as a school into the 1960s. After its final bell had rung, the building was used as Ancram Town Hall and later an antique store before it was purchased for residential use in 2012. An extensive restoration preserved many of the original architectural details, including the dual front staircase and bell tower.



### Directions to Next Stop:

Return to NY-82 and head northwest for 3.5 miles. Turn left onto County Road 11/County Route 11 and continue for .3 mile; slight right onto County Route 8. In approximately 4.2 miles, the destination will be on your right.

## 7 Snyderville Schoolhouse

County Road 8 just west of Green Acres Road, Snyderville

It's difficult to imagine a more rural, remote school than this one, but the Snyderville Schoolhouse taught many local children, grades 1-8, from 1860 through 1942. Comprising a small, rectangular wood frame with clapboard siding and a gable roof, the building still retains its small square bell tower. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2002.



In a 2018 article for *History & Heritage* magazine entitled "Education in the Middle of Nowhere," CCHS Sr. Research Librarian Jim Benton explained why the Snyderville Schoolhouse—and others like it in the County—is located so far from any apparent settlement. The story tells of the shifting sands of population in Columbia County. In the mid-1800s, Snyderville was home to a store, a hotel, two mills, a cider distillery, a blacksmith shop and about twelve houses. All of these settlements are now vanished, victims of declining population spurred by industrialization, economic depression and other factors. Through the 1920s the average class size was in the low twenties, but by the 1940s the student body of the Snyderville school had dwindled to just three. In 1942, the school closed and the remaining children were transported by car to Germantown Central School.

While the area's population decline has since reversed, the schoolhouse is just about all that remains of a once bustling community. Wrote Benton: "The structure stands today, a symbol of a time, now gone, when education was an important civil right, an obligation, and a path for children to exceed the accomplishments of their parents. A school in the middle of nowhere seems a very apt modern metaphor."

**Directions to Next Stop:** Head west on County Route 8 for 3.3 miles, then turn left onto Buckwheat Road. In 1.2 miles, turn left onto U.S. 9 S. In .2 mile, the destination will be on your right.

## 8 Clermont Academy: Birthplace of Public Education in New York State

1795 U.S. 9, Clermont

It isn't a one-room schoolhouse, but Clermont Academy is too important to the history of education in Columbia County and New York State to leave off the list. The school (which is no longer standing) opened in 1791 and was the first public school in New York. The original school was located where Clermont Town Hall now stands. The present Clermont Academy structure was built in 1834 on land donated by Edward Livingston, and functioned as both a school and a place of worship. It closed on June 16, 1944. The building is now used for community functions.



Wind down your drive in **Germantown**, located 6 miles northwest of Clermont (head north on U.S. 9, then turn left onto County Route 8 and continue until you reach Germantown). **Gaskins** offers curbside pickup as well as outdoor dining by reservation. Stop by the historical marker on Church Street in front of the Reformed Church which marks the site of the **first schoolhouse in Germantown**, built in 1711 by Palatines.



**Directions to Next Stop:** From Germantown, drive north on NY-9G for approximately 3.7 miles, then turn right onto County Route 10. The destination will be on your right in approximately .6 miles.

## 9 Linlithgo Schoolhouse

County Route 10 at Wire Road

**Note: This schoolhouse is now privately owned. Please respect the homeowner's privacy and do not approach the property.**

If you've got time for one more stop, drive by the wonderfully restored one-room schoolhouse on County Route 10 in the heart of Linlithgo. Built around 1839, the school was lovingly rehabilitated by a local cabinetmaker who fashioned a "facsimile of the original space," leaving distinctive features like the steeple and unusually large windows intact.



Around the turn of the 20th century, the school taught as many as 68 pupils, age 5 to 16. Records show that a teacher at that time was paid \$600 per year. According to a 1989 article in the *Register-Star*, "The older students kept the large pot-bellied iron stove stoked with coal and carried drinking water from a well in front of the parsonage across the road." There was no indoor plumbing, but in 1944 the school was wired with electricity. On May 3, 1949, local residents voted unanimously to send the remaining students to Germantown Central School. A few years later, the schoolhouse became the hamlet's first firehouse. Eventually, a new firehouse was built and the schoolhouse passed into private ownership.

**Explore more history, and consider becoming a member of the Columbia County Historical Society at [www.cchsny.org](http://www.cchsny.org)**

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