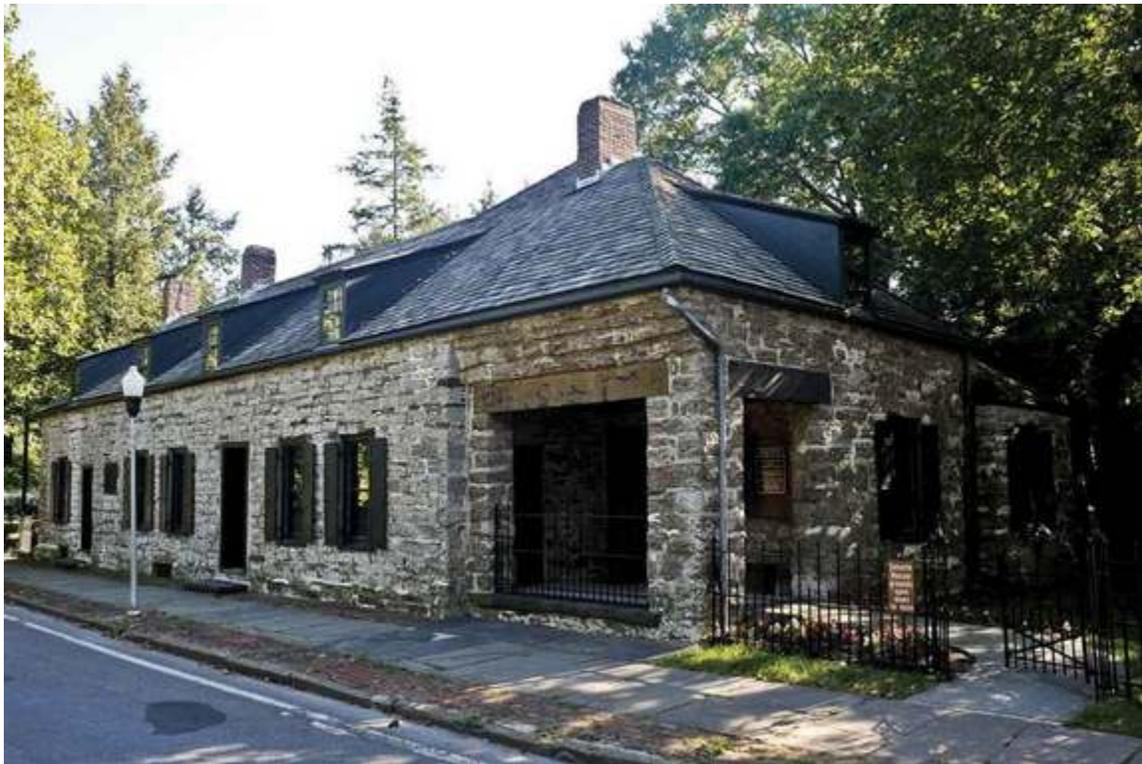


Community Pages

Kingston: an Ongoing Renaissance

by [Anne Pyburn](#) and photographs by [David Cunningham](#), September 30, 2011



Like a patchwork quilt handed lovingly down and embroidered by generations, covered in fine, intricate patterns that draw the eye and send the mind journeying, Kingston is a collaborative masterpiece—formed by creative souls of every imaginable persuasion and constantly evolving.

A BLAZING HISTORY

It was 1777, and Kingston was deeply engaged in the Revolution. The key waypoint between New York and Albany, the town had always had a Dutch soul. Religious freedom and no taxation without representation had been business as usual in Holland for 200 years, and the Hasbroucks and DeWitts and Bruyns and their neighbors had no use for tyranny. In the words of General Vaughn, freethinking Kingston was “a nest of rebels, a nursery for almost every villain in the country.” On a sunny Saturday in October, British troops rampaged through town and burnt the city to the ground, torching all but one of the homes. Seriously outgunned, the people of Kingston took refuge with their neighbors in Hurley, mourned their losses, counted their blessings, and pulled together to help one

another rebuild. Much of rebuilt Kingston still stands, lending the Stockade District a gracious and faintly haunted aura. And although it wasn't much fun in 1777, you'll have a blast watching the Burning of Kingston reenacted. The First Ulster County Militia and the Queen's 16th Light Dragoons will be mixin' it up on October 15 and 16, starting with an invasion of Kingston Point Beach.

COOL CREATIVE

The arts flourish here. The Arts Society of Kingston wreathes the city in sculpture on a regular basis, and a mass of diverse galleries await: the Kingston Museum of Contemporary Art, the Gallery at R&F, the Donskoj Studio and Gallery, the AIR Studio, Battledore Limited, Firehouse Glass Gallery and Artists' Collective, Wright's Gallery, One Mile Gallery—there are very good reasons why Business Week named Kingston fifth in a nationwide list of art-friendly cities. Kingston nurtures its arts scene with nifty settings like the Shirt Factory, offering gallery and studio spaces in repurposed industrial buildings, and collaborative efforts like the Brooklyn/Kingston Exchange Project at Gallery One Eleven.

High-spirited nightlife abounds, with venues like Backstage Studio Productions, Deep Listening—currently presenting the annual Dream Festival—and the Stella May Theatre Gallery offering cutting-edge theatre, music and art. Midtown is home to the Ulster Performing Arts Center, offering everything from ballet to the B-52s.

Down by the riverside, the neighborhood variously referred to as the Rondout or the Strand pulsates with creativity. The Hudson River Maritime Museum, which recently announced a new partnership with the justifiably renowned Clearwater organization, is showing a very Rondout photography exhibit at the moment: "The Faces of Work." The Strand was—and is—a working waterfront, its center lined with clubs, restaurants, and shops and its outskirts with marinas and a steelyard...and there's always something going on. Take a waterfront trolley ride or a tour on the Rip Van Winkle for another perspective on the sights.

UPTOWN LOWDOWN

The Stockade District, commonly referred to as Uptown Kingston, is an eight-block area listed on the National Registry of Historic Places and marked by Green Street, Main Street, Clinton Avenue, and North Front Street that formed the original boundary lines of one of New York State's first Dutch settlements. Historic buildings still stand intact from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, including the original Ulster County courthouse, the Senate House where the State of New York was established in 1777, and the Old Dutch Church designed by Minard Lafever, another National Historic Landmark—some survivors of the burning of Kingston by British forces during the Revolutionary War.

Today, the district throbs with activity. Alongside Kingston's workaday life of business and government as the county seat, Uptown finds room for the exotic, the artistic, and the delightful.

Uptown's where you'll find some of the Hudson Valley's best and brightest hard at work on a variety of good causes. Family of Woodstock, the LGBTQ Community Center, the Rural Ulster Preservation Corporation (RUPCO), the Queens Galley, and HOPE's Fund are strands in a creative safety net woven with enormous and inspired love. No matter the problem, somebody in Kingston has a good idea that will help.

Kingston celebrations are epic, innovative and frequent. Consider the O Positive Festival, happening this month, in which the healing arts come out into the street and jam with the fine arts. Art-loving dentists, chiropractors, and other experts barter their services directly with the participating artists, filling Uptown for three days with even more music and color and exuberance than usual.

Shopping experiences not to be missed include Bop to Tottom, an eclectic bazaar full of goodies from around the world; Catskill Art and Office Supply, where tending to the needs of artists has become a fine art in itself; Half Moon Books, run by a true bibliophile; and BlueByrd Music and Haberdashery. The Parent Teacher store and J&J's Hobby Shop are all about learning and fun. Columbia Beauty Supply's got everything you need for any look imaginable, whether you're looking to polish your everyday style, sparkle for a special occasion, or transform yourself into a mythological creature for Halloween.

"I love it here. It's home," says Uptown Business Association President Kevin Quilty. "Not everybody thrives in a quaint little one-street town. This is pure organic river city with a great history and an ongoing renaissance that just keeps getting better. When I go to the Digital Corridor mixers at Keegan Ales, I'm always amazed at how many young, brilliant new media minds have gravitated to this town."

Amazing, yes, but logical—Kingston's a place where such people will find a vibrant array of vital assets and amusements. Places like the Beehive and the Seven21 Media Center offer work and production facilities that creatives in many a town can only dream of.

In her position as Kingston's Main Street Manager, Nancy Donskoj of the Donskoj Studio Gallery finds herself continually and happily overloaded with great new entries for her online events calendar—and new friends. "I'm constantly meeting restaurant owners, store owners, people opening new clubs, the directors of not-for-profits—just so many people who are actively living their passion," she says. "There's so much energy and the quality's top-notch. Music, plays, poetry, art—there's a constant blossoming."

www.kingstonnycalendar.org/main-st-manager-blog

LOTS MORE ON THE MENU

From the Rondout to the westernmost reaches of Uptown, delectable eats are another Kingston art form. You'll find gourmet takeout at Bistro To Go, grass-fed organic meats at Fleisher's, fresh seafood at the Sea Deli—a family-run institution in Midtown for nearly four decades—and a wide selection of natural and organic treats at Mother Earth's Storehouse. Uptown, it can be tough to make a choice: There's Gabriel's, sweet, homey and delicious. Then there's Le Canard Enchaîne ("Lift a fork. Imagine you are in Paris"), the Hoffman House Tavern (circa 1711), and the Elephant Wine Bar, to name just a few. The Strand beckons with longtime standouts like Mariner's and Armadillo. The Kingston Farmers' Market takes over Wall Street every Saturday morning with over 30 vendors.

Kingston offers its citizens a charming variety of parks for outdoor contemplation and active recreation. Go watch the Tigers roar at Dietz Stadium one evening, or play some tennis at Forsyth Park, where there's also a nature center and children's zoo. There are neighborhood centers and

playgrounds, trails by the water, and a public beach seasoned with water-smoothed fragments of historic brick. The YMCA operates a state-of-the-art facility in Midtown with fitness and wellness centers, three gymnasiums, a pool and whirlpool, and a wide variety of programming.

New Kingstonian Jeffrey Robert Broido and his soulmate, Barbara, found their bliss in a 1900 Victorian they bought in Kingston. “We hung up the peace flag here, not sure what to expect, and a neighbor brought carrot cake,” Broido says. “Nobody even fussed when we put a witch on the roof. We’re home. We’re five minutes from great shopping, great sushi—we’re not lacking for any convenience. We sit in our garden and listen to the birds and the train whistle, the music floating up from the Strand on weekend evenings. People are real here. In Kingston, you wave and people wave back.”

So it’s really just a question of which kind of adventure you’d like. But be careful; this town gets under your skin. You might be hurrying along on your way to some mundane business errand, thinking ordinary thoughts, when the church bells stop you in your tracks, making you look up; a flock of birds is taking wing from an ornate gingerbread-laden roofline you’d never noticed before. Across the street, a guy in a business suit and a Goth teen are laughing together. A blast of reggae from a passing car mingles with the church bells for a moment. There’s one open table left at the sidewalk café and it’s calling your name. A stranger smiles. Your heart lifts and you realize there is no better place and time than right here, right now.

www.newrivernotes.com/ny/kingston.htm

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