

Like most small farmers in the area, the Kimlins relied on a varied farm economy that included milk and dairy products, swine for slaughter, poultry and eggs, garden vegetables, and fruit. The Kimlins began making cider from apples early, using a modest horse-powered press. According to family tradition, a commercial cider mill was erected on the site in the 1880's. The present machinery was installed at that time. In the third generation, as the suburban growth outside of the City of Poughkeepsie began to encroach on his and his neighbors' farms, Ralph R. Kimlin envisioned a plan to enhance his property and business, making them a local attraction. In his own words, Kimlin described his early efforts as follows.

From 1925 to 1935 we made our place into a Public Park and Game Conservatory, posting it as such and building a path entirely around it – also made a lake, expecting the Cider Business, to make the expenses. This continued until 1935 – ten years until the depredations by hunters and teenagers made it impossible to continue. Also the depression made it impossible to meet expenses and taxes. So we posted it all over again and went immediately back into farming, in which we have been ever since. The Museum however is open to the Public. There is no admission charged. The little coming in from Cider and cookies during the nine months off-season wouldn't pay for an attendant. So the Mrs. and I show the Visitors as best we can. [Kimlin, Ralph R. "Kimlin Museum 1702-1957' Educational & Historical." mss. 1957.]

During this time (1925-1935), Ralph R. Kimlin began to aggrandize the old frame barn that housed the cider mill. The museum room was added on the back of the mill, constructed with old barn parts and salvaged windows. Rustic stone chimneys were erected to vent huge fireplaces in the public rooms of the mill. A plaque was installed in the exterior of the one built on the south end of the building, providing a lineage of the property beginning with the King of England. Ralph R. Kimlin's name was carved at the end of this list with the date of 1927. The same rugged stone was used to embellish the doorway into the public areas of the mill, and stone walls were constructed along the road north and south of the building. Kimlin's intention was to encapsulate the entire building with stone creating a castle for his museum. In the interim, he installed decorative windows and brackets on the façade of the building, apparently salvaged from the destruction of other barns in the neighborhood. He never completed this project, and the façade elements remain while the walls of the rear addition continue to display the patchwork of sheathing awaiting their stone veneer.

Ralph R. Kimlin estimated that there were one hundred thousand items in the building. Many of them were the donations of neighbors. "Truly a community Museum," in the words of its proprietor. The front room housed a collection of Colonial building and farm tools, along with armor and old weapons. There were also stuffed animals of the local area. The large fireplace contained what their owner reputed was the largest andirons in the Hudson Valley (brought from England). There were booths built in along the walls and tables for the public to enjoy the Kimlins' cider and snacks. The east room, which was added to the barn, contained a collection of Stone Age implements and weapons. These included Native American objects, as well, plus fossils, shells collected by whalers, and paintings of the earth's evolution by local artist Elmer Tripp. Two more rooms on the south side of the mill contained a wide array of objects including shelves of household goods. The fireplace on the south end of the building was dubbed by its builder to be the largest in the Mid-Hudson Valley, and it was filled with a display of historic cooking implements. In later years, Kimlin converted these southern spaces into living quarters for themselves.

The mill was a frequent destination for ambling students from nearby Vassar College. In 1932, Vassar College president Henry Noble McCracken dedicated the Cider Mill's guest book. An article about the mill published in the Poughkeepsie *Sunday Courier* on December 1, 1935 glorified Ralph R. Kimlin not so much for his "nectar," but that he had built an institution out of his industry.

It is the Mecca for Vassar girls during their term at the college and they have made it famous around the world. Mr. Kimlin's register of Vassar students who have enjoyed the hospitality of the place contains the names of girls from almost every civilized country on earth. Some of them are from far off China and they signed their names in Chinese characters.

The Cider Mill was a watering hole and amusement park for students from other nearby schools, such as the Oakwood Academy, a private Quaker school, and the Poughkeepsie High School. Soon it was entertaining field trips from schools throughout the area. Not only did children receive a rare view of disappearing farm processes, but also they were introduced to a wealth of natural and historic curiosities.

The Cider Mill and its museum were favorite subjects in the Poughkeepsie papers at this time, particularly in the autumn when cider was flowing from the press. The Kimlins' enterprise became an important local landmark as one of the last surviving farms around Poughkeepsie as much as for the strange and wonderful curiosities it housed. Ralph R. Kimlin became a popular source of information about local history and a symbol of the "old way" in the changing pattern of modern life. He was no scholar, rather a charismatic raconteur who conveyed a romance for the past and provided an ironic figure in the fast developing suburban landscape.

This transcendent quality was not lost on the more critical academic and preservation-minded members of the community. The recognition by the likes of Henry Noble McCracken, who was a modern enthusiast of local history and author of two books on Dutchess County is particularly notable. Vassar girls were also visiting John Burroughs at his camp Slab Sides across the river. While not nearly as articulate as Burroughs, Ralph R. Kimlin was a storyteller, full of lore and tales, and the repository of much of the town's oral history. And like Burroughs, Kimlin was also a man associated with nature and a disappearing pre-industrial world.

A guide to Dutchess County published in 1937 by the American Guide Series, which was a product of the Writer's Project of the Works Progress Administration, identified the Kimlin Cider Mill as a point of interest in the environs of the City of Poughkeepsie. The entry cited it as "A local showplace with *atmosphere* ...a favorite rendezvous of Vassar College students." It remarked upon its miscellaneous exhibit of historic and antiquarian collections, the largest in the vicinity of Poughkeepsie, crowding low-ceilinged rooms. "Refreshments are sold, with cider a specialty." It was listed in the guide along with far more imposing institutions, such as Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery, Vassar College, and the Vassar Brothers Institute, from whence the Kimlins received their collection of mounted birds and animals.

In a letter written in 1957, Ralph R. Kimlin made an appeal to the Town of Poughkeepsie for tax relief based on the importance of his museum. He was not seeking credit for his years of hard work and financial sacrifice, rather he was underscoring the importance of his farm and museum to the community. (Punctuation, spelling and capitalization of the writer are maintained.)

The barn which I during my lifetime have transformed into the present Museum houses most of the heirlooms and tools of Colonial time.

Also through good luck and knowing the right people, most of Vassar's early collection made by the Whaling vessels as they toured the seven seas is here. (He [author's father or grandfather?] also must have made a trip to Europe for many paintings and works of art are among the collection here.)

Fossil remains left here by the receding glacier, stoneage hand tools of Prehistoric man and indian artifacts are all housed in our old building. Professors from other Museums tell me we need 5 acres of floor space to exhibit and classify the collection.

Shells and Corals which Vassar had promised the lady he hoped to marry are here – not the shipload he had hoped but a considerable amount – all classified on cards, handwritten.

"Guns and swords, pistols and daggers are all on exhibit. It is a veritable paradise for teenagers. Once here they are our best advertisers. No admission is charged. [writer's emphasis] Many groups of school children are brought here by their teachers from far and near schools. It is a tradition of the Anderson school of Staatsburg to come accompanied by Captain Green or Mrs. Anderson, each Thanksgiving. Poughkeepsie High School Sororities for years back have held their initiations in front of the mill...

...Vassar's first outside tradition was to walk to the Cider Mill with pails and pitchers to bring back Cider. On their maps – "Cider Mill Road" to this day...

Vassar sent to the Dakotas two expeditions during the 1890ties to search for prehistoric animal remains. They unearthed many specimens. They are here in our Museum now.

"There are many other treasures, too numerous to mention here. People who like to study the past come here in numbers. Authors, explorers, students of Archeology, Anthropology, geology, Conchology.

As President Rosen of Poughkeepsie once remarked Poughkeepsie wouldn't be the same with The Cider Mill and its many traditions gone. A local man visiting the Smithsonian Institution was talking to one of the officials there. On learning the visitor was from Poughkeepsie he blurted out 'Huh, the only thing there worthwhile is Vassar College and the Kimlin Cider Mill Museum.' That was before I.B.M. arrived.

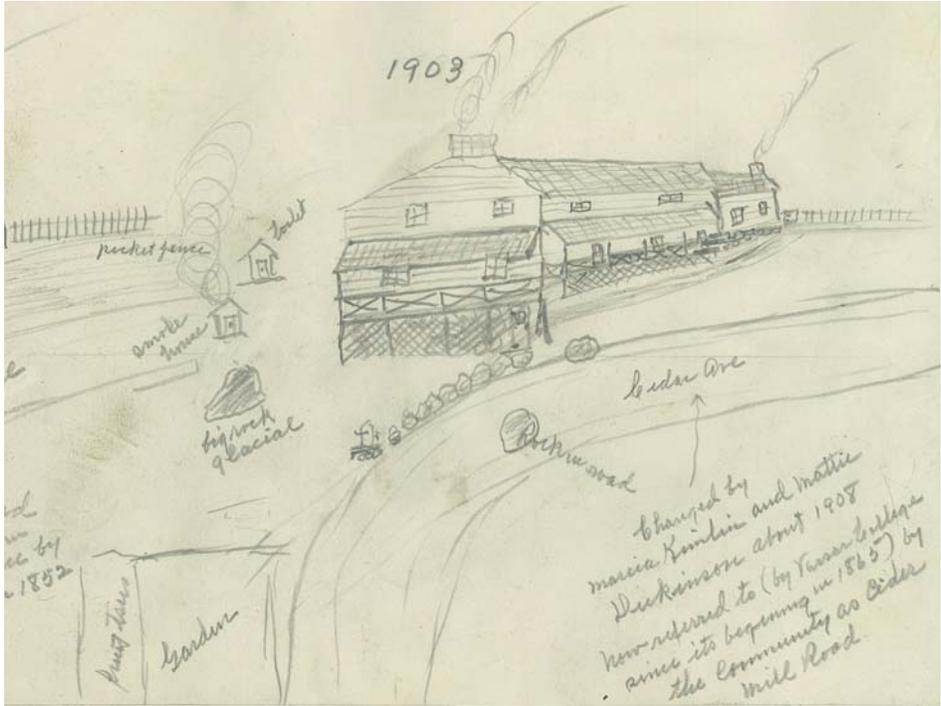
We and our little Colonial farm with its oldest buildings are surrounded by advancing business. Millbanks 165 acre farm is now Burke development. Hagen who brought up three farms has passed on. A wonderful, energetic man. His farm is now for sale. Ruperts Hudson River driving Park is gone. Vassar College with a thousand acres is giving up its last farming -- Guernsey Milk Herd. Vegetables went first, chicken next, pigs next —and now the fade out.

Don't you think it would be reasonable to help keep one of the first farms and now the last, along with the Museum of Local Antiquity.

For if Mr. Jorgenson's proposed tax increase of over 100% goes into effect there won't be any more Museum for the Public to visit or travel along its half mile of road (almost spoiled) watching the antics of sheep and lambs (when the dogs are not killing them). It is up to you. Once before an assessor saw the light of reason. The community wanted the old Farm and Museum kept.

[from typescript, "Kimlin Museum 1702-1957 / Educational & Historical" written by Ralph Richard Kimlin, 1957.]

Ralph R. Kimlin did not receive the tax relief or the recognition he desired. He was considered an eccentric, but his point of view regarding historic preservation and farm and open space protection are commonplace values in local and regional planning today. Kimlin kept operating the cider mill until his death 1969. He and his wife moved into an apartment he created there. His wife kept the mill functioning on a limited level until 1990 when her advanced age made it impossible to live there. The enterprise has been closed since that date. Ironically, Ralph Kimlin's son and namesake sold the cider mill and its 17.38-acre setting for the very residential development that the father had so strongly resisted. The old mill was slated to be demolished for a house site when local citizens intervened as the Friends of the Kimlin Cider Mill. In the year 2001, this group arranged with the developer to purchase the mill and an adjacent building lot to preserve the local landmark. Restoration and use plans are in the process of being written that will ensure the public's continuing enjoyment of this historic resource.



changed by
Morris Kimball and Mattie
Dickinson about 1908
now referred to (by Thomas Colledge
since its beginning in 1865) by
the community as Cider
Mill Road.

1852

Pickin road
Cider Ore

The hamlet of New Hamburg, which built up between 1820 and 1850, contains a number of buildings with Greek Revival features. Brick and wood frame dwellings of a modest village scale distinguish the hamlet, which became an active river landing and ferry terminal during this period. It was a center for lumber and building supplies, which may help explain the uniformity and quality of the buildings there. In 1824 New Hamburg was observed to be a “busy little village” with “a handsome collection of houses,” a landing and “an extensive store.”¹ By 1836 the hamlet contained about 20 buildings.² Yet on close examination, many of the existing historic buildings in New Hamburg are decorated with Gothic and Italianate features that are associated with the period of development following the arrival of the railroad in 1850. New Hamburg has a significant number of houses that incorporate Gothic features, which reflects a vernacular cosmopolitanism unique to small Hudson River landings. The modern elements generally were grafted to established building forms, in this case two-story three-bay and five-bay buildings. Two distinctive brick buildings display Gothic dormers and other features; one on Main Street apparently was a hotel, while the other was a multi-family dwelling (Figs. 48 & 49). The hotel has a small pointed dormer with an arched window and the deep eaves characteristic of the period. Its most distinguishing component is a two-story front porch with balustrades scroll-sawn in a Gothic pattern. Square-headed windows with stone lintels and half-story windows under the eaves relate to the Greek Revival taste and suggest that there is an earlier building at the core. The two-family dwelling on Point Street displays Gothic features already mentioned, such as a pointed front gable with a trefoil screen and bay windows, on the front. The current porch is a replacement. The brickwork on this building differs from that found on earlier houses, with arched three-tiered corbelled headers over the windows and pronounced water table and belt course between the stories.



Other two-family dwellings on Point Street have the same Gothic elements, but they are expressed in wood and at a smaller and more modest scale (Fig.50). The exteriors of these houses have been refinished with modern materials that obscure their historic features except for prominent pointed dormers. The skewed spacing of the front fenestration on the Millard House on Main Street indicates that an older two-story three-bay house was enlarged by an addition at the time the wide front wall dormer was constructed (Fig.51). The exterior is characterized by a number of Italianate elements, such as a wide dormer, brackets along the eaves, arched lintels applied over windows on the first story, and ponderous piazza detail. However, a pair of lancet windows in the dormer is a pronounced Gothic icon. The conventional two-story three-bay hamlet house also could be elaborated with a pointed dormer to express the new Gothic style as is seen in the Hoster House on Point Street (Fig.52). Based on the fenestration, this was likely the result on an alteration along with the

¹ From Spafford's *Gazetteer* as quoted in Smith, *History of Dutchess County*, 369.

² *Ibid.*

addition of a full front piazza. Yet, there is no reason that a house of this type could have been built from scratch later in the 19th century. A few late 19th-century domestic barns survive in New Hamburg, and they also reflect the Gothic taste of the period. Although the house at 10 Conklin Street is gone and replaced with a 21st-century retro-Gothic dwelling, a Gothic barn and outbuilding have been preserved on the site (Fig.53). Such accessory buildings were ubiquitous at the time and were considered further ornaments of a picturesque domestic lot and thriving river landing.