

## Historic County Sector

### Ramapo Heights Built On Pattern of Old New England

In the western part of Rockland County, at Sloatsburg, State Park Commissioner Robert H. Gittins is developing Ramapo Heights which in many respects is the most unique community in New York's metro-225-acre tract east of Route 17. Nyack became one of the chief just off the old Johnsonstown road.

Around a village green a number of colonial homes have just been completed. Each model is an authentic adaptation of some historic home of the colonial period. There is a Cape Cod house with extensions and additions, designed after a house which had shown that

it had passed through many generations. Here may be found a house which follows the traditions of the stone houses of Pennsylvania. In other models, doorways, windows and mouldings are reminiscent of the homes of the Connecticut Valley. Five houses now completed were designed by Chester A. Patterson, New York architect. The builder is Eric T. Carlson of Ridgewood, N. J. John J. Watson is the landscape architect.

At the "cut" further along on Route 17—Sloatsburg has an upper and lower village divided by a rocky hill on the right and over an iron bridge, one comes upon the old Johnsonstown road which passes Ramapo Heights. Here is Spruce Lake fed by Roaring Brook, a large grove of hemlock trees and a quaint village green. The swimming facilities in the lake are fine—good clear spring-water, a float, a 25-foot steel diving tower, and a shallow wading pool for youngsters. A steep road which comes down from the mountain is used as a ski run. In winter the bath houses become skating shelters.

#### "Common Lands" Set Aside

One of the most important features of this development is the more than 25 acres of "common lands" (including "the green," the grove, lake, and parks) which have been set aside for the members of the Ramapo Heights Association. The entire 225-acres is covered by building and plot restrictions which run with the land.

This section of Rockland County has an extremely interesting historic background. In fact, its economic development is closely linked with that of Nyack and Haverstraw. The Nyack turnpike was built to bring the products of the Ramapo Valley to Nyack where they shipped aboard the sloops and schooners. Because of freight, much of which came from the Ramapo Works and Sterling Mines, Nyack became one of the chief shipbuilding communities in the county.

At Ramapo were the Pierson



One of the houses in the Ramapo Heights development at Sloatsburg

Works where the first cut nails and first slot-headed screws were made. Perhaps the country's first international trade, in the modern sense, was carried on from this point. The Pierson Brothers manufactured cotton cloth which was sent to Russia in return for Russian iron used in their rolling and splitting mills. Here they invented the "automatic check loom" upon which a patent in 1819 was granted Jeremiah H. Pierson for "Improvement in the Art of Weaving." As far back as 1798 the Piersons did a tremendous business in "sugar nails" and in hoops for whale oil barrels. Newburgh, it will be recalled, was an old whaling town.

#### Old Hoe Works

Stony Brook runs through the front of the Ramapo Heights tract. Where the dam forms a pond, was located the hoe works of Adner Allen—the grandfather of Sloatsburg's Judge Charles Allen. Here in the old days were made three-cornered hoes for scraping the decks of whaling ships. To a man in Pennsylvania, Adner Allen wrote: "send us 10,000 ash handles for hoes." Nearby, the Noble-Townsend Company which operated the first Sterling Mines, did a big business in ships' anchors. It also made the first chain that held successfully across the Hudson at West Point. This chain was carted to West Point in sections, taking New England teamsters six weeks to do the job.

Stony Brook was first mentioned by Charles Clinton in his survey of the "Great Mountain lots" of Rockland, then a part of Orange County, in 1735. It took Clinton twelve years to complete this survey. "I

had no chain bearer and was directed to keep my journal with my watch, which I did beginning at the first station on Thursday the 22nd day of April 1742, having William Lindsay to carry out provisions and William Thompson to mark the trees. At three minutes crossed the road to Haverstraw we marked a red oak. I suppose a minute may be equal to two chains. At 480 minutes being six o'clock made a wiggwam and lodged at a stony brook." This is the first mention of Stony Brook of the Ramapo Heights Tract.

In this section, not far north of Ramapo Heights, is Tuxedo Park, the most exclusive residential community in the country. The Tuxedo tract was used as a club long before Pierre Lorillard formed the Tuxedo Club in 1885 or '86. In 1820 Josiah G. Pierson, Michael Shults, Isaac and Stephen Sloat of Rockland County and Jonas Seeley of Orange County organized the "Deer Hunting Party" to keep a boat on Tuxedo Lake. Pierre Lorillard, who had bought the 5,000-acre farm from the estate of Solomon Townsend in a foreclosure sale in 1814 gave the above gentlemen the hunting privileges.

#### Iron Furnaces Set Up

Solomon Townsend, related to Peter Townsend, proprietor of the Sterling Mines, had called this tract Augusta and set up the iron furnaces at Augusta Falls just beyond Tuxedo Park. Before Townsend owned the property, the Finch family leased the tract as grazing lands from Lord Stirling—the Fifth and last Earl of Stirling. Mrs. Robert W. McCready, living with her husband in Sloatsburg, was a Finch. Robert McCready, inci-

dentally, up until the time of his retirement about 15 years ago, had built five-eighths of all the houses in Tuxedo Park.

In Ramapo Heights the environment for which this section of Rockland is noted, will be preserved. The new homes will come within the moderate price classification. Each plot, however, will be unusually large. Around the "Village Green" frontages run from 120 to 100 feet, dependent upon the contour of the site. All locations have views of valley and hills. Each house has a two-car garage and a dining terrace. The whole tract has an altitude of between 450 and 700 feet. Conveniently near are the shops of Suffern and Tuxedo Park. The George F. Baker High School at Tuxedo Park is one of the best-equipped schools in the state.

Today the driving time to Sloatsburg is about 40 minutes from George Washington Bridge. In 1825 Henry L. Pierson had a horse he called Screwdriver which drove him from Weehawken ferry to the homestead in two hours and fifteen minutes. Note from the Turf Register—At Jamaica, L. I., May 15th, 1826: "Screwdriver beat Betsy Baker in a four mile race of two-mile heats. Time: 5:36 and 5:38."