

# The History of Hillside

## Early History

### Native Americans and Tenant Farms

The Weckquaesgeek was the Native American tribe that lived in our area. Local lore suggests that a wintering ground for the Weckquaesgeek was near today's water tower above Chemka Pool. We know that an Indian trail ran through the Hillside area.

In 1682, the Weckquaesgeek sold what are now Hastings and Dobbs Ferry to Frederick Philipse, who divided the Hastings area into four tenant farms. From 1775 through 1783 the farm that encompassed Hillside was rented by Hastings tavern owner Peter Post, who played an instrumental role in Hastings' Battle of Edgar's Lane.

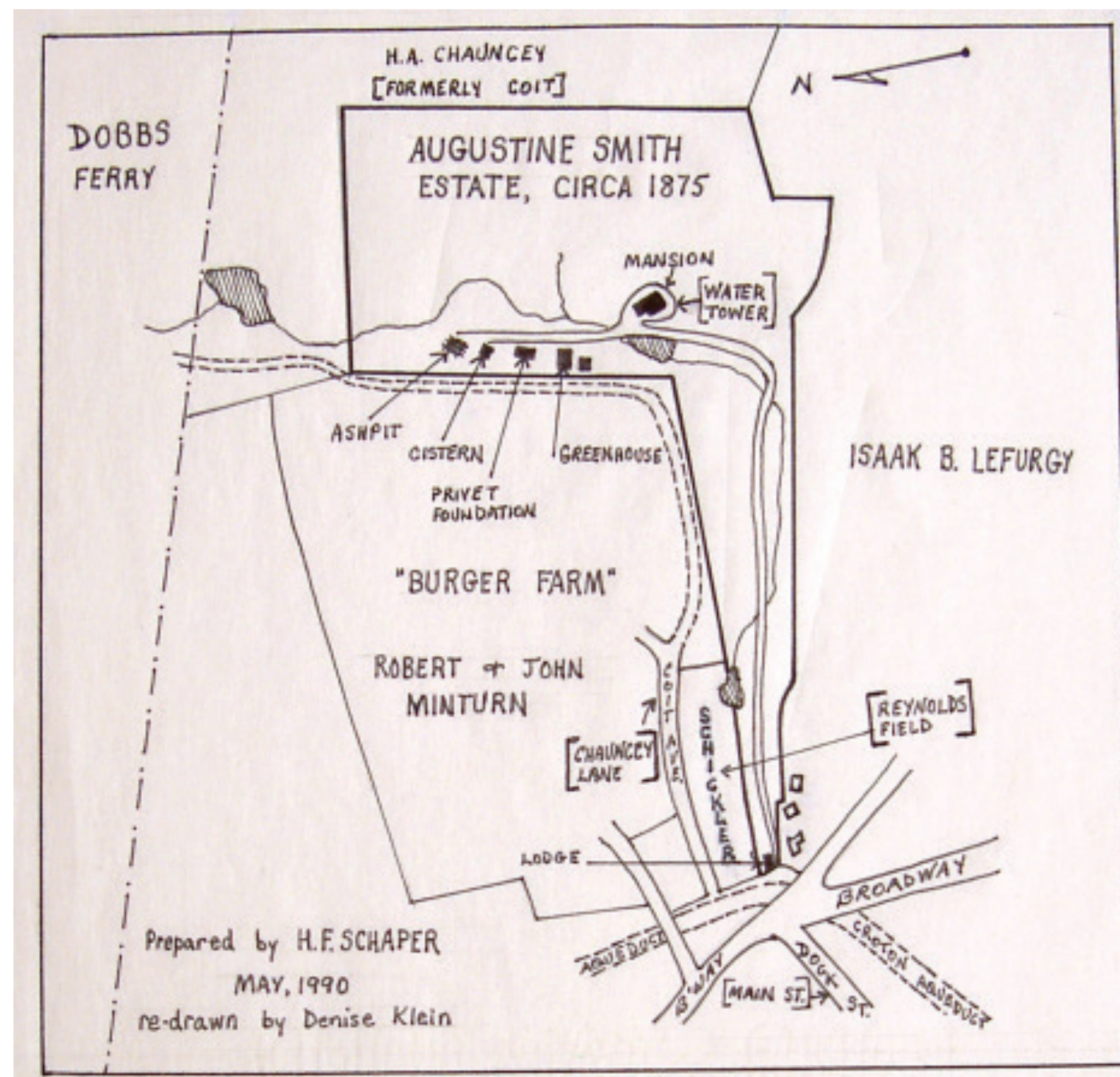
After the Revolutionary War, Peter Post paid £715 for the 286-acre farm he had previously rented; just to the north, James deClarke purchased a 225-acre parcel for £675. Eventually, Van Brugh Livingstone of Dobbs Ferry came into possession of the Hillside/Reynolds Field parcel. William Edgar bought most of deClarke's property, a portion of which eventually became Children's Village.

### Hillside as a Residential Estate

In 1842 Livingstone sold 60 acres of Hillside land to Alexander Birnie for \$1,050. Birnie built a two-story Greek Revival-style house where the water tower now stands.

In 1864 Mary Dabney Smith bought the property for roughly \$27,000. The estate became Augustine and Mary Smith's summer residence, and they remodeled the house in the French Empire style. The gardens and greenhouse were near what is now the Hillside tennis court area.

The Smith family owned the estate for 33 years, selling it in 1897 to Letitia Sands. The Sands family sold the property two years later to the Cochranes (after which Cochrane Avenue is named), who lived there for some 14 years.



A sketch of the buildings that were part of Augustine and Mary Smith's estate in what is now Hillside Park, done by Hastings resident Hans F. Schaper. In 1990, Mr. Schaper prepared a study for the Hastings Historical Society on the archeology of Hillside Park.

### The Establishment of a Hospital

Hillside then passed into the hands of David W. McFarland, a doctor who remodeled the house into a hospital, which he named the Spring Hill Sanitarium.

In 1923 the Village adopted zoning regulations that classified the 49 acres outside the hospital as Prime A Residential. Four years later, McFarlane sold his property to the Jewish Mental Health Society, who moved 40 mentally ill patients into the former mansion and renamed it Hastings Hillside Hospital.

Two years later, the Society filed plans for a \$1.25 million expansion to accommodate 160 new patients. The Village rejected the application as a now non-conforming use and sued the Society. New York State courts sided with the Village. In 1936 the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the case, which meant that the lower courts' ruling would stand.

As an alternative, the Society filed plans in White Plains to develop their property into single-family homes. The development, called Spring Hill, would have extended existing Hastings streets into the Hillside area. These plans never came to fruition.

The Society left Hastings a few years later, re-establishing itself as Long Island Jewish-Hillside Medical Center in New Hyde Park, Long Island. "Hillside" comes from the hospital's name when it operated in our Village.



A postcard of the Spring Hill Sanitarium, which began operation in 1913. In 1927, it was sold to the Jewish Mental Health Society, who renamed it the Hastings Hillside Hospital. It was located where the New Rochelle water tower now stands, just off the path from Chemka Pool to Hillside School.

### Hillside Park

In 1941 the Village acquired the Society's property for \$16,250. After the purchase, the Village built a dam, and created Sugar Pond out of what had been a swamp.

The Hillside Hospital structure was razed. Around this time, one acre was sold to the New Rochelle Water Company for a water tower.

In 1959, 39.7 acres were declared as a park under New York State law, restricting their use to recreation. In 1961, 13 acres for Hillside School were traded to the Board of Education in return for 11 acres east of Reynolds Field. Hillside Pool was opened in 1965 and renamed Chemka Pool in 1984.

In 1964, there was a proposal to put two Little League fields in the meadow area next to Hillside School. Under the leadership of Charles H. Callison, a Hastings resident who was then Executive Director of the National Audubon Society, the residents of Hastings banded together against this idea.

It was at this time that the Hastings Nature Program Committee built a trail through the park to aid in the study of the habitat there. In 1965, a series of school-sponsored nature walks were first organized. The Hillside Nature Guide Program, run by volunteers, continues to this day.



Photo of boys kayaking within Hillside Woods, possibly at Vernal Pond. Until the late 1980s, Children's Village owned the eastern portion of Hillside, which they used as a wilderness playground for summer campers.

### The Effort to Preserve Hillside Woods

In 1987, Children's Village sold 48 acres for \$5 million to Henry Gross, a Manhattan-based developer, who planned to build 82 cluster homes on the woods east of Hillside School. Concerned citizens formed The Committee to Preserve Hillside Woods, whose goal was to maintain the land in its natural state.

In December of 1993, with the help of the non-profit Trust for Public Land, Hastings purchased this tract with funding from the Village, Westchester County and New York State, as well as contributions by local residents. It was due to the efforts of these citizens and our Village administrators at the time that this large section of Hillside came to be a Village/County Park, with access open to all Westchester residents.

Children at Hillside School were enlisted to write letters of support in the effort to preserve Hillside Woods. This letter is one that was included in the packet put together by The Committee to Preserve Hillside Woods.