



This photo of Main Street was taken approximately at the end of the nineteenth century. The street happily remains much the same. At the far right is the post office. To its left stands the Bedford Academy built in 1807. Today, the

Nature has smiled on Bedford. As one drives through rural lanes, the eye can take in a picture of grazing horses on the rolling acres, broken here and there by woods, punctuated at generous distances by comfortable homes. Meadows and homes are neatly fenced by post and rail or, less frequently, stone walls. "Good fences make good neighbors." It's a farm country with plowed fields, where the animals are horses and an occasional herd of cows. It is, in short, estate country, and the farms are farms of nostalgia.

Three-quarters of the region which extends from Bedford Village on the east to Bedford Hills and Katonah on the west is zoned for four acres. Less than half of it is developed, and

much of it is held in parcels larger than four acres.

A social economist would classify the owners of these acres as persons who possessed a very generous share of discretionary income, which, we may add, has been expended with discretion and taste. The rural landscape is rich, harmonious, and unusually beautiful.

All roads lead to Bedford Village. To the south there is a Bedford Road in North Castle, to the southwest there is another in New Castle and it extends to Mount Pleasant. To the north Katonah has its Bedford Road. In all, the township of Bedford encompasses thirty-six square miles and includes Bedford Village, Bedford Hills, Katonah, and a piece of Mount Kisco.

In the beginning the Village was the center of the Township. It was the county seat with a County Courthouse, an honor and source of revenue and influence it shared with White Plains until 1870. In the eighteenth century it was the senior partner. At the time of the Revolution it was the largest village in Westchester.

Bedford was settled in 1680 just about a hundred years before its homes, courthouse and meetinghouse church were burned to the ground in the American Revolution. Tarleton Road in the Village remembers the name of the British general who ordered the torch. He did so partly because the militia kept a harassing fire on his troops from homes and barns, and partly because this was



BEDFORD

Time has been
no problem for Bedford.
While it continues to keep in step
with the demands
of social and cultural progress,
it successfully maintains
an attitude of peace and harmony
with its earliest heritage.

by Tom Parker

firehouse stands in that spot. The Bedford Academy building was moved over to the other side of the firehouse and is now the Bedford Free Library. The steeple of the Presbyterian Church looms above the post office.

patriot territory, so he gave it a taste of war. Tarleton spared only one house, that of a loyalist, which shows most clearly the political sentiments of Bedford's early settlers.

Utterly destroyed by war, the Village literally rose from its ashes to the white, clean store fronts, public buildings, and homes we see today. The style is late New England Colonial and early Federal (the post office is Greek Revival) because the Connecticut people of this village were transplants into New York.

So much of lower Westchester's past is buried under brick and concrete that we have only an occasional historic building and the documents and relics to prod our imagination. But here in Bedford we have a late eight-

eenth century and early nineteenth century village "on ice," so to speak, visualized for us in total, and almost perfectly preserved. It is not hard to see Tarleton's redcoats charging down Colonial streets, or to imagine one of his lieutenants, Simcoe, eating at a Bedford woman's table, thanking her for the hearty meal, and then giving her a half hour to get her things out before her home is put to torch.

The Village preserved shows another facet of Bedford character—an intense zeal to preserve its past. The local historical society, whose able president is Lloyd Bedford Cox, Jr., is unique in that it owns the public buildings on the Green, except the churches. It rents out the post office and stores on strict conditions that their exteriors shall not be

changed. It also took the initiative to place the village in a national landmark district to add further protection. The historical hall, formerly a church, was pulled over a mile to its present site by a team of forty oxen in 1838.

If Bedford Village represents the old, Katonah and Bedford Hills represent the new. And if the Village survived an ordeal by fire, Katonah survived an ordeal by flood, when in 1895 the Great Croton Dam created the reservoir system, homes of old Katonah had to be auctioned off and the owners used capstans and oxen to drag them on greased runners a mile to a new location. Two landscape architects were hired to map out the new village and broad Bedford Road and the tree-centered parkway are the happy result.

Katonah does not quite capture the gentried charm of the Village. Its typical home is that of post Civil War small town America. Frances Duncombe who is an historian and an author of children's books, has written about a twelve-year-old girl growing up in Katonah just before the dam was built and the village moved. The picture she paints is of a neighborly, fairly egalitarian society where everybody knows everybody else and in emergencies all are expected to pitch in to help. The houses are rather square with a front porch or veranda in front and around the sides. They are large for their city-sized lots, and with their big windows they look even bigger than they are. They look comfortable on tree-lined streets, comfortable and solid.

The New York & Harlem Railroad was extended this far in 1847, and it is fair to say that Katonah is its offspring with a bustling personality of its own. The railroad pushed the growth of Katonah. While the Village stagnated, Katonah, by the end of the nineteenth century, was the most populous hamlet and "capital" of the township. A market town for farmers, it became by the end of the century (along with Bedford Hills) a commuter station for New York City. The two railroad hamlets represent a large element of diversity in contrast to the uniformity of the estate region, yet each thrives with its own personality.

Katonah leads a vigorous cultural life. The Village Improvement Society is a century old and has been a force for preservation and beautification in that part of the township.

The Katonah Library is excellent, the best in the township and the site for lectures by such outstanding intellectuals as Barbara Tuchman and Professor Vincent Scully. Adjacent to the library is the Katonah Gallery, an institution that is a happy hybrid of a museum and a conventional art gallery, a center that has gained a countywide reputation for discrimination and excellence in its twenty-five years of existence.

What Katonah Gallery is to art, Caramoor is to music. Caramoor is a beautiful creation of the imagination of the late Walter Tower Rosen, a New York investment banker, and his wife Lucie. The Rosens blended several Mediterranean styles and achieved a pleasure palace in rose-pink rose stucco walls and deeper rose of tile roofs. Well-known professional musicians play chamber music in the lovely Spanish Courtyard and opera



Photograph by Ted Van Winkle

The Post Office built about 1838 served as a harness shop before its present use. It is a Greek revival structure with lovely Doric columns.

and orchestra works in the larger Venetian Theater. To sit in the arcaded courtyard amid orange trees and beds of flowers and to listen to Mozart is an unforgettable esthetic experience.

Bedford Hills, the third hamlet or unincorporated village in the Town of Bedford, is an example of what determination and grit can do to overcome great odds. It is located on what is now the Penn-Central Railroad roughly halfway between Katonah and the incorporated Village of Mt. Kisco, which is the commercial center of Northern Westchester.

In the beginning (1847), and every time the railroad management looks for economies it says to Bedford Hills "you don't need a station here, use the Katonah or Mt. Kisco station, either one is only two miles away." In the mid nineteenth century farmers in this area pressured the railroad to stop at Bedford Station, and the hamlet was born. It changed its name to Bedford Hills in 1910. The railroad lies in the valley but the village itself climbs a steep hill that rises to the east.

When, a few years ago, the Penn Central had to be reorganized financially, Bedford Hills faced once again the spectre of losing the railroad depot. Merchants confronted with the pros-

pect of operating in a dying community near the station no longer improved their premises. A low point was reached; then in "Operation Bootstrap" the merchants went ahead on their own, improving their store fronts and making a number of them into new style boutiques. The garden club helped with plantings and flower boxes. A proposed gas station next to the library was scratched and instead an old house was attractively decorated to become the home of a crafts store. The numbers of other interesting boutiques grew. There is a beautiful fabric store, a tack shop, an interior design shop, a sportswear store. The railroad relented and is still stopping at Bedford Hills and the villagers and merchants can relax once more.

At the heart of Bedford Hills is its Community House, built for \$65,000 of 1920 dollars. It is the home for twenty-five town organizations which hold meetings there.

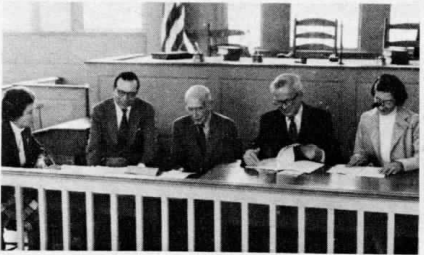
Bedford Hills also houses the Bedford Correctional Facility. From the golf links of the Lakeover Country Club one can look up and see the brick buildings of the state's only prison for women. At the guardhouse gates of the facility are large white signs with red lettering in English and Spanish, warning that drugs, guns, knives, explosives,

and other harmful devices must not be brought inside. We are reminded of a world beyond the thirty-six square miles of Bedford township

Gentry or country gentry type of life were phrases I encountered on repeated occasions as I traveled through and researched the Bedfords. There is a feel of English gentry life in the rolling hills, the seemingly easy pace, the love of the horse.

For Bedford, indeed, is superb horse country knitted together by eighty miles of riding trails maintained by the Bedford Riding Lanes Association.

Preservation of the past is also very important to English gentry, which perhaps explains why the historical society was able recently to raise over \$50,000 to buy additional acreage



The Old Court House, built in 1787, is the oldest public building in Westchester and the second oldest in the state. It is still in use. The Bedford Historical Society holds its Board of Director meetings there. From left to right, Phyllis Dix, Peter Ehrlich, J. Randolph Coleman, Lloyd Bedford Cox, Jr., Mollie H. Long.

to preserve the setting of the venerable Bedford Oak (on Cantitoe Road between Bedford Village and Katonah) estimated to be 500 years old.

It may be that the key to the transfer of old world gentry values to the new world is to be found in the homestead of John Jay, located on Route 35 near Katonah. It was the place he looked forward to in his retirement.

Jay could look back upon a life filled with honors and demanding posts in the service of his country. He held about every high post short of the presidency. At crucial points he supported the patriot cause in the Revolution, negotiating help from Spain and

pressuring Britain to ease out of the Northwest territories. After the war was won, he wrote some of the Federalist Papers to secure ratification of the Constitution, and as Governor of New York he pushed for abolition of slavery within the state. He was also the first Chief Justice.

Locally, this Founding Father must have been a towering figure, and a model country gentleman for all to follow. And the pattern followed in his descendants. Included were a county judge, two abolitionist leaders, a colonel who fought with distinction at Gettysburg and Chancellorsville, and a U.S. Minister to Austria. When the great influx of new wealthy men in the 1890s and early twentieth century surged into Bedford, there was a country gentry model to emulate.

ice of his country?

What is Bedford's future?

Can this country gentry life—with its four-acre zoning and its ease and spaciousness that give such a distinct tone to life in Bedford—survive in our modern world?

The forces of change are strong. Pressures on the land in the form of subdivision and development seem relentless. The Master Plan says Bedford is one of the high and rapid growth areas around New York City. And a new factor is *The Road*, U.S. 684, which rips through the estate country in six lanes of concrete ribbons from the city to points north. Its growling sound is as unceasing as surf (truckers run by night) and it makes Bedford an easy commute to places south. We recall how in an earlier age the rail-



The oldest house in the Village Green which goes back over two hundred years is still occupied today. Its owners are Mr. and Mrs. John P. Renwick.

The old Homestead may have something to tell about this. For the most part it is a simple farmhouse of the early nineteenth century with a broad front porch, wood or coal stoves, and Jay furniture. But the west wing built by Eleanor Jay Iselin (Mrs. Arthur Iselin) in 1923 is a large beamed hall, like the great hall of a medieval castle. Incidentally, it is of interest to note that a well-known descendent of the Iselins is John Jay Iselin, president of Channel 13. No longer a resident of Bedford, his attachments are still strong.

On every side of the old Homestead are Jay portraits: Jay himself in robes of the Supreme Court; the Civil War Colonel, the Judge, and finally, Eleanor herself with a half smile on her lips. This new wing was a monument to family pride, of course, but wasn't it also a monument to the gentry ideal at its finest—a patriotic man in the serv-

road contributed to the decline of Bedford Village and to a rapid rise in Katonah and Bedford Hills (and nearby Mt. Kisco). *The Road* is the new railroad, riding on concrete instead of steel, attracting commerce and people to the easterly (Bedford Village) part of the Town.

Another growth factor if the spread of corporate offices south of the Village—in Armonk, IBM world headquarters—and in White Plains and its Platinum Mile of office buildings, all now an easy commute to Bedford—thanks to *The Road*.

With these considerations in mind, I went to interview Albert V. Marchigiani, Supervisor of Bedford at Town Hall between Katonah and Bedford Hills. The Supervisor is something new in Bedford. He is a Democrat, the first Democrat to achieve office in sixty years. He was elected Supervisor in

1973, reelected in 1975, and again in 1977. Two fellow Democrats (one a woman) form a majority on the Town Board.

In discussing the challenge of growth, Mr. Marchigiani said Bedford had taken a number of actions. It was increasing its multiple housing in the Bedford

Photograph by Ted Van Winkle



Home of John Jay, first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court

Hills-Katonah area by allowing development of 160 units of housing on a Babbitt Road site. "That's a lot of housing," he said. Sixteen units would be reserved for senior citizens and twelve model units were under construction. To provide land for single house development, the Town Plan permits "conservation" zoning in certain areas, clustering houses on one- or two-acre plots and leaving the remainder open land. "When you do that on a four-acre basis, you are leaving a lot of open land for green space," he said.

To broaden the tax base, he favors office building development. This is already permitted in two places, but the Supervisor thought that these two sites were not as well situated to permit heavy traffic that an office building of perhaps 1,000 employees requires. He said he thought that a third office building zone should be established near the junction of Route 172 and *The Road*.

"Won't that proposal get flack from nearby estate owners?" I asked. "I suppose so," he replied, "but the Town Administration needs the money to operate, and the taxpayers need a break." He judged that four-acre zoning in Bedford was legally pretty secure, because Bedford provides multi-housing and smaller subdivisions.

Thus, Bedford's government's strategy aims at adjusting to the pressure of growth while at the same time attempting to preserve as much as possible the spaciousness of its existing land. Gently but surely Bedford will find a way. □