

A Town Called Cresskill



It should be noted that the material in this book, such as the names of chairmen of organizations or names of businesses, was gathered during 1992 and 1993. Certain facts and names may have changed by the time of publication, late in 1993.

* * *

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Note: Many individuals have not been identified in photographs, as the photographers did not supply this information at the time the pictures were taken. Regrettably, the lack of time did not permit determining the identity of such individuals. Readers may enjoy being able to spot familiar faces within the pictures.

William Zimmer, Joseph Cioffi, Oswald Longfield, and Peter Keegan are residents of Cresskill, as are the members of the Cresskill Centennial Committee. Jonathan Lehmann is a former resident.

* * *

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* * *

Cover photo: A view of the old Borough Hall. In the foreground is the bell that hung atop Cresskill's first two schoolhouses.

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A hundred years' anniversary gives cause to celebrate. This book was written for the people of Cresskill in 1994 and for the people of Cresskill in the years, decades, and centuries to come. It is meant not only as a history of a town, but as the story of that town and how its history has created its character. As such, it is dedicated to the people of Cresskill, past, present, and future.



Cresskill Centennial Committee

John A. Sestanovich, Chairman
Marlys Lehmann, Vice Chairman
Joseph V. Donnelly
Dorothy Giguere
Charles H. Lehmann
Henry A. Mazzola
Andrew G. Paspalas
Mary Reinemann
Mary Joy Sestanovich
John E. Spring
Jeune Tandyrak
William Zimmer

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

September 2, 1993

It is a pleasure to send greetings and congratulations to all who are celebrating the 100th anniversary year of the incorporation of the Borough of Cresskill.

Since its birth, Cresskill has provided a place for people to raise families and build a sense of community. It continues to appeal to those who seek a peaceful community near the thriving metropolis of New York. Cresskill offers a rich and diverse heritage that spans some of the most important moments in American history. Each of you can take pride in your contributions to the development of our nation and to the history of New Jersey.

I hope your birthday celebration was a huge success.

Bill Clinton

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Acknowledgments

Cresskill's mayor, John Bergamini, began the seed for this book, by initiating the Cresskill Centennial Committee. He knew what he wanted, got his chairmen, and then stepped back. But he was never far from the proceedings.

By appointing John Sestanovich chairman of the new committee, John Bergamini found the right person for the right job. As a retired Cresskill school principal, John Sestanovich knows many people; he knew where to reach to form his committee. John gives an assignment and then leaves the person he's appointed to do the job, but he's there if help or advice is sought. Nice qualities for an educator. Nice qualities for a chairman.

Bill Zimmer is the town's photographer. His excellent eye for composition and his quest for beauty are evident in the later pages of this book. He photographs with the heart; he knows what moves people. And he's got another talent--on the computer. Learning as he went along, and with infinite patience to "get it right," he laid out the pages of this book: What had begun as word processing and floppy disks ended up as camera copy for the printer, a huge saving in publishing costs. Such a task isn't accomplished in a few days. It took nearly one hundred hours to design all the pages, place the pictures, and compose them all on the computer. And he made it enjoyable. Despite the frustrations and complications, it was fascinating work. His patience and his expertise were remarkable.

Without John Spring, the borough's historian, this book would not have come into being. He was the source for much of the information in a 1964 booklet written at the time of the state's tercentenary, on which the early chapters of this book are based. For this book he wrote, edited, and added to those same chapters in this book. His anecdotes of historical interest appear throughout the book. He doesn't have to rely on research material; he is the research material, much like a living history book with a prodigious memory.

The 1964 booklet delineating Cresskill's history to that point was an important resource at this time. Gratitude and credit must be paid to the late Harold Tallman, who wrote the earlier booklet, and to his research and editing committee: Eleanor Santic, Ruth Soverio, Jack deMarrais, and Elaine Rothman, as well as John Spring and John Sestanovich. A bibliography of materials used by that committee appears at the end of this book.

One person received more telephone calls over the months of the writing of this book than anyone else--as many as three calls a day. Dot Giguere, Cresskill's borough clerk, was a member of the Centennial Committee, but she was more. Her files were impeccable; any question could be answered from them within minutes. Her sense of humor added to the pleasures of the writing of this book.

She wasn't the only one with a sense of humor. Henry Mazzola, also a member of the committee, contributed many of the interviews and all of the history of the beginnings of the high school. He contributed more. A word here and a word there from him could liven up any meeting. To give Henry his due, Italian Americans *are* very wonderful people, in Cresskill and everywhere else.

Jeune Tandyrak edited each chapter, as did every other member of the committee. But she read each word, probably three times, and her suggestions were valuable. Because she was so closely connected with the nation's bicentennial year as celebrated in Cresskill in 1975 and 1976 and from her happy memories of the event, she contributed that en-

tire section of this book. Her sense of organization and her patience helped when she was appointed borough archivist during the project and categorized the thousands of photographs stored in Borough Hall in preparation for use in this book and for the borough's future records..

All the other members of the committee, who bore other responsibilities in preparation for the centennial year, read each chapter, making this book, in effect, edited by committee. Joe Donnelly, Charly Lehmann--who is a good editor and an excellent thesaurus, Andy Paspalas, Mary Reinemann--who researched the beginnings of Cresskill's churches--and Mary Joy Sestanovich were the other committee members.

Other townspeople made calls and visits to research material for the book. Dori Gerber's interviews with some of the wonderful people who have lived in Cresskill helped to make them come alive on the pages. Carol Angarola's enthusiasm for this project carried over into her doggedness in spending hours in front of a microfiche to research parts of the book. AnnMarie Sweeney is a real estate agent; there couldn't have been a better person to ask to research Cresskill's older houses. Mary Pasi found material that seemed, at times, would never be forthcoming, but she didn't give up until she wrenched it out. Kazumi Kiteji was delighted to be a part of the research committee; her ideas and insights and contributions were important. Jean Early, new in town but eager to become a part of it, used her professional skills to contribute various accounts. Warren and Earlyn Earabino distributed a questionnaire they wrote to every business in town, which, in turn, generated good information. Many people's memories were incorporated into this book, in large part from audio and video tapes made in previous years. The tapes had to be found first, though. Joe Miller in the Bryan School took the time to hunt them down. Afterward, Jeune Tandyrak spent many hours transcribing the video tapes onto paper so that they could more easily be studied and edited.

Scores of people took the time to answer the initial questionnaire the committee sent out. Many of their responses became springboards for further research. Hundreds of people were called; from their memories the story of Cresskill could be woven.

Every organization cooperated by sharing its background. The schools; the principals, led by Al Di Donato; all were valuable resources.

Included in the book are memories of people who were videotaped or recorded in the eighties. Many of them have since died. As such, these historical treasures were all the more valuable. Sally Stern was one of the people most involved in their preparation.

Many people are mentioned and quoted in the book, but three in particular should be singled out for their help. Richie Barretta, Bill Cook, and Gerry Vukasin were in Cresskill all through their childhoods; they love Cresskill and shared that love by sharing their memories.

And finally, the person who pulled the book together, who wrote it, perhaps loves Cresskill as much as anyone quoted in the book--after nearly forty years in Cresskill and after seeing many changes, that love remains unabated.

Marlys Lehmann

1

A Town Called Cresskill

One hundred years. 1894 to 1994. One hundred years of a town called Cresskill.

A hundred years is not a long time when it's measured against 300 years, against the time when Dutch settlers signed a peace agreement with Chief Oratam of the Hackensack Indians in 1662. It's less time compared to over 200 years ago, during the Revolution, in 1776, when the troops of Britain's Lord Cornwallis landed on the Hudson's shores and climbed a trail through a geologic fault in the Palisades to take Fort Lee and pursue General George Washington and his men across New Jersey.

Yet, it's a long time when compared to the Cresskill of 1894, with its thick forests filled with berry bushes that small boys could pick from when they were done with their chores. A long time when comparing the 7,500-people suburban town that is Cresskill today with the bucolic little village of 300 or so people of

just four generations ago.

The lands that comprise Cresskill had been settled long before the borough was incorporated in 1894, but it took a group of courageous citizens to initiate the idea that the town that is Cresskill today was to be separated from its neighbors, which together were known as Palisades Township. By incorporating as a borough, these people took advantage of legislation passed by the state in the early 1890s that enabled them to avoid paying the school tax debt the township had incurred. The necessary papers were filed and signed, the judge of the county court so decreed, and on May 11, 1894, the incorporation petition was filed.

A map of the proposed borough was attached to the incorporation petition. On it the boundaries were those of today with one exception. In 1894, the borough's lands extended to the Hudson River, past what is now the Palisades

Interstate Parkway and over the Palisades. Shortly afterward, however, the citizens of what was to be the borough of Alpine availed themselves of the same advantage as had the citizens of Cresskill and incorporated themselves as a borough. Cresskill retained its frontage on the water until 1903, when it lost this property to the borough of Alpine, thereby creating today's borough limits. With the deeding of the river front to Alpine, Cresskill lost what was one of its greatest claims to historical fame.

Cresskill's part in the Revolutionary War centered on the land that fronted the Hudson River. Through this site, the landing area for British troops, the town that would be Cresskill was a player in the drama that resulted in freedom for the United States. Although the land is no longer part of Cresskill, its pride in this history survives.

2

The Years Leading to the Revolution

Until the British took over New Amsterdam from the Dutch in 1664, there were no permanent settlements in the northeast section of Bergen County. The men of the Dutch East India Company were traders, not settlers, and their purpose was to deal with the local Indians, the Lenni Lenapes, for furs, especially beaver skins, in exchange for trinkets, tools, guns, and liquor. Whatever settlements were established were for the most part wiped out in an Indian uprising in 1643 brought on by the arrogant and insensitive policies of the Dutch Governor General in dealing with Native Americans. While the Dutch were still trading, however, it's probable that some of the furs they were trading for were trapped or hunted along the brook called today the Tenakill--"Tiene-kill" (meaning willow stream), where fur-bearing animals were trapped and hunted well into the twentieth century.

Settlement in the Northern Valley began after the British king made land grants to various political favorites through the New Jersey Proprietors. Two of these favorites were Isaac Bedloe and Jacobus Courtland, who in 1688 received the land where Cresskill is located. Tracts such as this were usually one-mile-wide parcels of land running from the Tenakill to the Hudson River. It's difficult to pinpoint the location of these land grants, or patents, because when the two streams in the same valley were described, Overpeck Creek, which flows south from Englewood, was confused with the Tenakill, which--contrary to the usual direction of travel--flows north from Tenafly in the same valley.

Early settlers to the area that is now Cresskill found richly endowed land. Springs and streams from the western slopes of the Palisades provided fresh water and power to turn mills for grinding grain and

for other purposes. There was abundant swampland that teemed with wildlife, both vegetative and animal. Farmers grazed their sheep and cattle on the hillsides and used the densely forested area atop the Palisades for their lumber and firewood needs. A few enterprising owners had "pitching places," from which they could slide wood from the top of the Palisades to the riverside, where it was floated downriver to the New York market. Those owners whose land didn't extend to the forests bought separate "woodlots" to supply their needs. Many farmers also owned salt-hay lots along the creeks or in the marshes along the Hudson River. The salt hay, which they cut in the winter and hauled in sleds, was used as bedding for farm animals, for mulching crops, and for storing the ice that they cut on local ponds. Access to the Hudson assured them of a supply of oysters, clams, and shellfish, and

the spring run of shad provided a supply of fish that they could salt and store for later use.

The only early roads in the area were those that followed Indian trails, such as the crude trail that led to the Hudson River. Here, because of the grade leading to the river, farmers weren't able to use wagons; they had to haul by using sleds that could be dragged by horses. The only north-south road was present-day County Road, which was then called the Closter--or Kloster--Road (since the entire Northern Valley area north of Tenafly was then called "Closter"--probably in reference to the walled-in aspect, much like a cloister, of the land in the valley behind the Palisades). The swamp ground, especially in the areas near to the Tenakill, made it hard to cross the valley west to Schraalenburgh without going north to present-day Hardenburgh Avenue or south to present-day Clinton Avenue.

In the years between 1683 and 1872 Cresskill was included in the territories known as Hackensack Township, one of the three territories comprising Bergen County. In 1872, with the division of Hackensack Township into five smaller units, Cresskill's lands were included in Palisades Township, which also included the present-day boroughs of Oradell, Dumont, Tenafly, Bergenfield, and New Milford.

The Westervelts, De-

marests, and other Jersey Dutch farmers who had migrated to the area from New Amsterdam and from other colonies put the lands and other resources to good use. They provided much of their own labor by raising large families, though this often cost the mother her life at an early age. Some men had as many as twenty-five children by a succession of three or four wives.

In addition to the use of children as a source of labor, part of the farm and household work was also done by slaves. It was usual for most farmers to have a few slaves. Slavery was an accepted practice in areas where the Dutch Reformed religion was followed, as it was in the Cresskill area. Many of the slaves, in fact, themselves joined the church.

Travelers who came through the region in the eighteenth century noted the well-kept, productive farms. And they marveled at the well-built sandstone houses constructed in a style to be found nowhere else.

Jersey Dutch farmers realized that they could quarry and shape for building purposes the red sandstone underlying much of the area. They erected sturdy, foot-thick walls for their houses by incorporating this stone with a mortar of mud and straw. The earliest of these buildings had simple gable roofs with a loft that was reached by a ladder. Just as did later generations in the mid- to late-twentieth

Of Rocks, Water, and Time

Cresskill's history dates to geologic time. The Cresskill area was geologically active, and is reflected in current landforms. Two kinds of rocks comprise the bedrock, sedimentary sandstone (which became building blocks for the early Dutch homes) and shale, while igneous diabase comprises the Palisades. The sedimentary formations were the result of millions of years of sand and mud washing down from the highlands to the west.

About 190 million years ago molten rock, or magma, was forced upward through rifts to form a massive ridge 40 miles long. Erosion exposed the remains of this volcanic sill, which became the Palisades. Because magma cools slowly underground, the igneous rock formed hexagonal columns that are most apparent along the Palisades' eastern escarpment overlooking the Hudson River.

Beginning about 15,000 years ago, the ice sheet covering most of northern New Jersey scoured the landscape and altered the Hudson River. Because of ice blockages near Manhattan, the Hudson was forced through a gap in the Palisades at Sparkill, New York. At that time the Hudson's outlet was that of the Hackensack River's below the Meadowlands.

As water always runs downhill, and a northbound course is unusual, Cresskill's own watershed stream, the Tenakill, possibly was changed by these glaciers. Glacial deposits--from sand to huge rocks--were dumped at the head of the Tenakill in Tenafly and may have separated the stream from south-flowing Overpeck Creek, into which the Tenakill may formerly have flowed. (This close proximity between the two streams caused confusion among early settlers, evident in the first maps of northeastern Bergen County.) Meanwhile, downward erosion by the Hudson River, flowing into the Hackensack River valley to the west, would have captured the Tenakill's waters. After the glaciers receded, the Hudson resumed its present course and the Tenakill flowed north to Closter and the south-flowing Hackensack River.

Cresskill's Tenakill flows at a level of 35 feet; the town's lands rise gradually eastward first to 100 feet, and then sharply to a height of 400 feet at its easternmost boundary, the western slope of the Palisades.



A portion of Huyler's Landing Road at the turn of the century. The road played an important part in the Revolutionary War and was a major thoroughfare for farmers taking their wares over the Palisades to the Hudson River and to market.

such issues as taxes. But the religious convictions of most of the population ran deep. The predominant church organization in the Cresskill area was the Dutch Reformed Church, which had originated in Holland and had supported William of Orange in his war against Phillip of Spain and the Inquisition. Discontent developed when the farmers objected to men who didn't understand local conditions but who governed their church affairs. This led to an increased demand for independence in church matters and

century, the farmers renovated their homes: They sometimes increased the upper floor's living area by adding dormers. One early Dutchman, however, thought of a new way to expand his living space. He built an additional outer wall parallel to the original with a matching roof angle. He then joined these two with a roof at a lower angle. The result was a gambrel roof (named for the bend in a horse's leg). Other farmers in the area adopted this style when they built their sandstone houses. These homes represent one of only two indigenous styles of house architecture developed in the United States. (The other is the ranch house, which also figured prominently in Cress-

kill, in the 1950s.) Many of Bergen County's 200 or so sandstone houses on the National Register of Historic Places--of which four are in Cresskill--have these gambrel roofs. Cresskill has two of the finest, one at 50 County Road, north of Crest Drive North, and the other just north of Union Avenue, beside where Dunroven Nursing Home is today.

Considering the farmers' handsome homes, productive farms, and large families, one wouldn't expect them to have had much dissatisfaction with British rule in the period before the Revolutionary War. In fact, there seems to have been little discontent during this time about economic problems or about

consequently in matters of government rule.

Since some adherents wanted to retain close ties to the church in Holland, this led to a deep split in the church organization in America. Two separate church bodies were set up in 1748. They used the same buildings but worshipped at different times with different ministers. By the time of the Revolutionary War, this division was comparable to a mountain-family feud. Generally, those who favored independence in church matters also favored independence in governance, while those who favored loyalty to Holland in church matters tended to be loyal to the British king. The undercurrent of disgruntlement presaged trouble.

The Huyler Homestead

The most prominent of the sandstone houses in what would become Cresskill was the Huyler Homestead on County Road, which, like the Westervelt house, is a fine example of gambrel-roofed sandstone houses. In recent times the Huyler homestead was preserved by the family who had lived in the house for more than two decades after they bought it in 1941. Ernest and Anne Hansing used the home as a setting for their collection of American- and Dutch-colonial antiques.

After Ernest Hansing died, his widow married Milton O'Connor, who was also a collector of clocks and antiques. During the bicentennial (of the country's independence) celebration, the O'Connors participated in the reenactments of the 1776 invasion and the 1779 Tory raid, using their house as a backdrop. They were pleased and proud when an historic site marker, paid for by the Cresskill Lions Club, was placed on the homestead property in 1979.

After Milton died in 1980 and Anne the next year, Althea Fletcher, their survivor, who had raised a family in the so-called slave house, was forced to sell the homestead property in order to liquidate the estate. It was sold in December 1983 to developers who announced their intention to subdivide the property and perhaps tear down the historic landmarks.

Mayor Michael Dressler and the Council rejected the pleas of many borough residents that the town purchase the historic site; instead they took immediate action to prevent demolition of any of the buildings on the property.

They quickly adopted an historic preservation ordinance that would require clearance from a newly appointed borough Historic Preservation Commission before making exterior alterations to historic landmarks and declared themselves ready to fight, "to the Supreme Court, if necessary," to preserve the historic integrity of the site.

The developers contested, and the judge ruled that the borough could not prevent the changes the developers planned. As it happened, the state at this time passed enabling legislation that might have upheld the borough's suit, and the Mayor and Council went to court again. This time the ruling was that no exterior changes could be made without approval but that the nearly three acres could be subdivided. The developers subsequently built four more houses on the property, with room for one more.

In April of 1984 John Spring, Cresskill's borough historian, persuaded the developers not to cut down any more trees; some had already been cut. His efforts were thwarted, however, by a tornado--not a usual occurrence in New Jersey--three months later that knocked down a large tree onto the Huyler house roof.

It was only because there was a fire in the house in 1986, which caused the residents of the house to flee it, that the borough discovered that the developers had rented the house to a woman who was illegally housing elderly invalids who appeared to be getting a minimum of care. The tenant was evicted; plans for renovation continued.

Eventually, communal concern that the homestead would be razed abated. The developers preserved the exterior and restored the interior as much as they could. They even rebuilt the barn to its original form after it collapsed as it was being moved onto the same property as the house and outkitchen, so as to free the property on which it was located for development. Cresskill's folks, who had feared that their most treasured historic landmark would lose its distinctive charm, were relieved that at least it was still standing and recognizable.



3

The Revolution and Its Aftermath

The differences simmered beneath the surface until November 20, 1776, when Lord Charles Cornwallis and his army, after taking New York City, invaded New Jersey by way of the crude road that led from the present-day Cresskill area through a break in the Palisades to a small dock on the Hudson River. By 1776 that dock had become known as the New Closter Dock--or Landing--to distinguish it from the Old, or Upper, Closter Dock about a mile to the north.

How Cornwallis would have known about such an obscure landing place was a mystery for years until, in 1963, Dr. Richard McCormack, a Rutgers historian, found that a Northern Valley loyalist, John Aldington, had guided Cornwallis in making the invasion. Another local loyalist named John Ackerson owned the 180-acre tract of land that bordered the "Road to the New Dock," the invasion route. He probably was also one of the network of Brit-

ish sympathizers who aided Cornwallis on that fateful November day.

It became evident that the British had prepared the ground well for the invasion when Cornwallis's army marched into Hackensack after brushing aside a holding action at New Bridge by some of General Washington's men.

Hundreds of local loyalists had already donned the green uniforms of British provincial troops and were formed into the 4th Regiment of New Jersey Volunteers under the command of Abraham Van Buskirk, a prominent physician and former officeholder. Throughout the war men who favored the British and who had left their homes in the Northern Valley area came by boat from New York City and from Paulus Hook (Jersey City). They attacked farms in the present-day Cresskill area, carried off crops and livestock, and burned the homes and barns of patriots. They cap-

tured some of the patriot farmers in these raids and took them back to New York City, where the patriots were kept in prison, usually until they died or until they could be exchanged for other prisoners.

One adolescent boy, Benjamin P. Westervelt, was captured along with his brother Cornelius and a cousin, 29-year-old Daniel Westervelt, in the "wolf den"--a wolf's lair in the Tenakill swamp near his home in which the three young men had attempted to hide. They were betrayed by a Tory neighbor, Samuel Cole. Daniel Westervelt died of jailhouse fever on October 23, 1777, in the New York City prison, a few days after the birth of his fifth child. Benjamin was exchanged for a loyalist prisoner and afterwards served several terms in the Bergen County Militia under Captain John Huyler and Captain Thomas Blanch. Cole went to Nova Scotia with other loyalists

evacuated by the British after the war. There is a story that he returned to the Northern Valley later and was hanged.

As the war dragged on through 1778, it became apparent that the British and the Hessian troops would not easily defeat the rebellious Americans. In 1779 the State of New Jersey began to confiscate the property of Tories who had left their homes to fight for or to be protected by the British. These confiscations enraged the loyalist refugees from the Northern Valley, so volunteers were always eager to participate in raids to attack the area. In the spring of 1779 the raids had increased to such an extent that the local militia, paid by Northern Valley farmers to defend their lives and property, faced a crisis. Their numbers were too small, and they were ill equipped to fight off large bands of raiders who came with no warning and at any hour. The State did not respond to the militiamen's pleas for reinforcement, and so the men carried on, standing guard night after night and sleeping away from home for long periods to avoid capture.

The worst raid of the war, on May 9, 1779, came "by way of New Dock," according to a newspaper account written then and datelined "Closter." In this raid about 100 former residents of the area, organized into a corps, ranged along the Closter Road (now County Road) and torched homes and

barns. An account of the day reported: "This day about 100 of the enemy came by way of New Dock, attacked this place, and carried off Cornelius Tallman, Samuel Demarest; wounded Hendrick Demarest, Jeremiah Westervelt, Douwe Tallman, and they burnt the dwelling houses of Peter Demarest, Matthias Bogart, and Cornelius Huyler, Samuel Demarest's house and barn, and attempted to burn every building they entered, but the fire was in some places extinguished. They destroyed all the furniture and clothes in many houses and abused many of the women. They were of Buskirk's troops--some of our Closter and Old Tappan neighbors joined by a party of negroes. I should have mentioned the negroes were the first to grace the British arms." (During the war, the British promised freedom to slaves who would come over to them and take up arms against their former owners. Many did so and, along with other loyalists, were transported to Nova Scotia when New York City was evacuated in 1783.)

Captain John Huyler, whose home in Demarest was one of those burned, was stationed with the militia in Schraalenburgh that morning. According to his account, some inhabitants gave the militiamen the alarm, after which they fought the raiders and "retook about ninety head of cattle which they had stolen." It was apparently

too late, and their numbers were too small to do more than that.

In the war's aftermath local militiamen came into their own and became solid citizens of the Northern Valley. It's interesting to note the names of some of these early settlers, as their names live on in local town and street names as well as in the names of their descendents.

Benjamin Westervelt, the boy who had been captured in the "wolf den," survived fighting and imprisonment and returned as a man to the Northern Valley. He built a fine sandstone house with a gambrel roof in 1808 on property that had been in the Westervelt family for generations. It was located on the old Closter (County) Road that had been surveyed for General Washington in 1778. It stands today, the gambrel-roofed house on County Road, north of Union Avenue. Benjamin's descendants would continue to live there for more than 200 years; they include many prominent community leaders and officeholders. The house today is still owned by an indirect descendant of the Westervelt family.

In 1784 Captain John Huyler bought the 180-acre property that had been confiscated by the state from John Ackerson, the loyalist who may have betrayed the landing place for Cornwallis's attack and who owned the farm that was bordered on the north by the invasion route. Huyler

paid £1,658, or about \$8,500, a high price for the time. Though the former owner had been compensated for his loss by the British and had been given land in Shelburne, Nova Scotia, when the British evacuated New York City, Huyler was apparently concerned that Ackerson descendants might contest the confiscation. He spent several years and more money securing the property from possible claims that might be made against it.

Captain Huyler also signed an agreement in 1786 with his neighbor to the south, Sir James Jay, as to who would own the fence between the properties. Sir James was the brother of John Jay, U.S. diplomat and later Chief Justice of the United States.

In 1836 Captain Huyler's son Peter built a sandstone

home that is the epitome of this type of architecture. The earliest Dutch sandstones had been built of irregularly shaped blocks of stone. As time passed and the builders' skills increased, the stone blocks were squared off--at least on the front of the houses. Peter Huyler, however, went well beyond this. He spared no expense or effort in building the family homestead and had the stone blocks on the front exterior walls formed using a shaping device that cut quarter-inch parallel grooves across the stone faces so the blocks were perfectly squared off for fitting together. No other Bergen County sandstone home has such finely finished stonework. The lintels, still showing the marks of the stonemason's work, were shipped down the Hudson from a quarry in Nyack.

The fireplace in the parlor was framed with finely grained black marble from Belgium. Peter's concern for detail extended to the carriage house, which had a slate roof on its cupola. This is the house at 50 County Road.

Like many other Jersey Dutch farmhouses, the Huyler Homestead had an "outkitchen" with a large "stand-up" fireplace, which was used for doing the family cooking, especially in warm weather when it kept the main-house kitchen from overheating. Since the Huylers, like most Dutch farmers in the area, had a few household slaves until early in the nineteenth century, this outkitchen is today frequently referred to as a "slave house." It could not, however, have been used as a slave house. By 1836 when the house was built, the Huylers' slaves had long since been freed, following legislation in New Jersey adopted in 1804 aimed at ending slavery.

The Huylers' former slaves and some of the slaves' children continued to work for the Huyler family as servants or as field hands. One of these men was "Old Sam," who, until his death in 1880, drove an ox cart to and from the crude road to the Hudson and in later years drove commuters home from the railroad station. Two descendants of Huyler slaves, Kate Brown and her brother Tom, lived on in a small waterfront house near Huyler's Landing until about 1915.



Katy Brown, a descendant of a Huyler slave, is shown in front of her home at the Hudson River shore just north of Huyler's Landing.

4

Huyler's Landing Road

Improving roads and constructing new ones became a major concern of government once the Revolutionary War ended. The Bergen Turnpike from Hackensack to the Hoboken ferry was chartered in 1802 by Colonel John Stevens, the ferry's owner. Travelers and farm produce could then go by stagecoach or wagon down the valley to the "pike," with a stop at Dan Kelly's tavern in present-day Fairview for an extra team of horses and from there over the Palisades ridge to the ferry.

In 1816 enough of the Tenakill swamp was filled in so that an east-west road could be designated by the County. The "new laid" road--Madison Avenue--ran from Schraalenburgh Road to the Closter Road (County Road). The continuation of that road toward the Hudson River was labeled "the Road to the Closter New Dock" on the surveyor's map.

George Huyler, one of the sons of Peter Huyler who

had built the homestead on Closter (County) Road, sought to improve access to the Hudson River by making Huyler's Landing Road a major artery. Late in the 1830s, according to one account, "One of the various enterprises projected and consummated by the present owner of the farm, George Huyler, then an energetic young man, was the opening of a proper approach to the Hudson River from the old County Road near Cresskill, also the establishment of a dock suitable for a steamboat landing and other purposes. The road from the top of the Palisades to the river bank, considering the early date of the enterprise, was made at a grade showing excellent engineering judgement, and the road was substantially built and well maintained chiefly at the owner's expense, for many following years. The dock was well built, and subsequently a dry dock was constructed for ship building purposes, and a

store established for the sale of ship chandler's wares and general merchandise. At the dry dock, conducted by a practical shipbuilder, several vessels were annually repaired."

In the ensuing years, Huyler's Landing Road became a major transportation route between the valley and New York City. The growing importance of the road was reflected in the records, which showed that in the mid-nineteenth century there were two ways to go to New York: by stagecoach to the Hoboken Ferry (50-cent fare) or by coach or wagon or horse to the boat at Huyler's Landing. One Schraalenburgh resident said, "Before the days of the stage, we went to New York on a ferry boat running from Nyack to New York. Father always being a very busy man obliged us, when we went to New York, to make a very early start for the ferry. We drove by way of Cresskill to Huyler's Landing on the Hudson. One

morning we were on top of the Palisades at daybreak and I saw a red fox cross the road in front of the horses."

Probably the most important function of the road, however, was the



Huyler's Landing Road.

transportation of farm produce to the New York market. Heavily laden wagons, frequently pulled by oxen, took produce, especially the strawberries for which the region was noted, to the landing for shipment to the New York market.

Sometimes as many as fifty wagonloads a day would make the journey, some of them returning with supplies for the farms in the area.

The coming of the North-

ern Railroad of New Jersey in 1859 diminished the importance of the road. In the last years of the nineteenth century the landing was no longer used for commercial purposes but as a resort and amusement area for pleasure boats from the city. With the development of the Palisades Interstate Park after the turn of the twentieth century the road ceased to have any function except for use by hikers and picnickers.

In later years the road was cut up by the Palisades Parkway, partly fenced off by the Greenbrook Nature Sanctuary, and became overgrown in most of the Interstate Park area.

The Case of the Missing Marker

Cresskill's connection to Revolutionary War-era historical fame was contested, and defended.

As the newspaper article following the Loyalist raid of May 9, 1779, said, the attack had begun at New Dock in "Closter." There were two roads leading to the Hudson River in what was then called Closter, which encompassed what would later be Cresskill, a Lower, or New Dock, and an Upper, or Old Closter Dock. For many years the general belief had been that the landing had taken place at Upper Closter Dock Landing, or the continuation of Closter Dock Road. And so the borough of Closter maintained.

It was when John Spring, now Cresskill borough historian and then, in 1961, a newcomer to town, investigated that he found otherwise. It was he who defended Cresskill's right to claim its place in history.

When Spring heard a passing remark by Mayor Leonard Carlson, who referred to Huyler's Landing Road (by then no more than an overgrown path) as a Revolutionary War road, he began to investigate. Spring had grown up in Dumont and had not heard this statement before.

It took interviews with the then-residents of the Huyler homestead and with a descendant of the Huyler family living in New York State, it took studying research projects, atlases, and history books, but no verifiable account indicated that the landing had oc-

curred anywhere but in Closter. It was only when Spring joined the Bergen County Historical Society and the Society's Revolutionary War Round Table that the maps, records, and documents there indicated that the 1776 invasion might have come by way of the road later called the Huyler's Landing Road.

As a member of Cresskill's committee to celebrate the 1964 New Jersey State Tercentenary, Spring researched where to place an historic marker at the Huyler's Landing Road to commemorate its importance to the Northern Valley in the nineteenth century. When he studied exactly where to place the marker, he found in county road records that the continuation of Madison Avenue in Cresskill, east of County Road, was called "The Road to the Closter New Dock . . ." This was the link. The newspaper account had referred to the enemy landing at New Dock. Further investigation turned up a Revolutionary War map made for Washington's surveyor general in 1778, which labeled the road "Road to the New Dock . . ." as well as a report written to Washington by General Anthony Wayne in 1780, which described both the upper and the lower Closter landings but stated that "the enemy . . . found means to carry up a few light field pieces . . . in 1776" at the lower landing. A British map Spring later unearthed bore out these statements.

With the concurrence of the Bergen County Historical Society, Spring wrote up the words for the marker. Residents of Closter and Alpine, who had for years referred to their place in history through the Cornwallis landing



The residence of George Huyler on County Road in Cresskill.

and had placed markers at houses and roads, objected.

When a marker at the Huyler's Landing Road on Route 9W disappeared soon after the New Jersey Tercentenary Commission placed it, Spring said he had his own ideas of where it had gone. "Obviously," he says, "some people did not want it known that Revolutionary War events happened here as well as elsewhere."

The New York Times was drawn into the fray. A 1975 article about Closter quoted some of that town's spokesmen as saying that Cresskill was trying to rob Closter of its history and heritage. Spring protested to the *Times*. The same *Times* reporter interviewed him and wrote another article, this time stating the facts as Cresskill and the Bergen County Historical Society saw them.

By then it was 1976, time to celebrate the bicentennial of the Revolution. Again, John Spring planned events with other members of the town's Bicentennial Committee. They engaged men to portray uniformed "troops" and reenact Cornwallis' attack by climbing Huyler's Land-

ing Road, which was then usable but not cleared. Closter partisans had also paid a few men to "attack" by way of Closter Dock Road. When Spring heard that the bus was unloading the troops at the Alpine boat basin instead of at Huyler's Landing, he

used all his resources to bring most of them back to the "lower road." About ten men, paid by another town's bicentennial committee, stayed behind; the rest, along with about fifty local volunteers--men, women, and children--climbed Huyler's Landing Road.

Closter did not attack Cresskill over the incident.

Cresskill's marker, which had stood at the corner of East Madison Avenue from 1964 until it was stolen in September of 1976, was returned about a year later. It had not been taken by anyone from Closter, but by members of the Bergen County Bicentennial Committee who felt they had to take sides in the controversy. The Bergen County Historical So-

cociety, after studying the matter again, finally reaffirmed that the 1776 invasion had come "Cresskill's" way.

In 1976 Cresskill's Bicentennial Committee offered an award--\$200--to a Cresskill High School student for the best project produced in connection with the historical year. Satori Iwamoto won the prize for his research on the 1776 British invasion of New Jersey. Iwamoto enlarged and made more legible a map of Huyler's Landing Road that mapmaker Robert Erskine had created for General Washington's surveyor general to aid in the movements of Washington's army. The writing and a dotted line showed the road going to New Dock--Huyler's Landing Road. The prize helped--a little--to defray costs at Harvard University, where Iwamoto was headed. He is now practicing medicine at Johns Hopkins Medical Center.

An Eagle Scout Project

Had the story of Huyler's Landing Road ended with its becoming overgrown and impassable, it would have been an ignoble end for a road that figured in such an important way in American history. In 1974, in preparation for the bicentennial of the American Revolution, John Sturm, a Cresskill Boy Scout working on his Eagle badge, asked permission of the Palisades Interstate Park authorities to clear the remaining portions of the road in the Park as a hiking trail. But Park authorities, saying it might be "dangerous," suggested another project.

A few years later, when it was, however, too late for John Sturm to do the job, Park authorities permitted the clearing after hikers from the New York/New Jersey Trail Conference urged them to do so. Another Cresskill Eagle Scout candidate, John Scofield, working under the guidance of Carl Wallin, scoutmaster of Troop

127, completed the project. Along with other Cresskill scouts and their leaders, they built up eroded sections of the slope, cleared away obstructions, and blazed the path clearly from the Long Trail near the Parkway to the remains of Huyler's Landing.

Huyler's Landing Trail was opened officially in April 1982 with the cooperation of Park authorities. Richard Huyler of Chester, Vermont, a direct descendant of Captain John Huyler, cut the ribbon to open the trail.

When, almost a decade later, Tammy Brook Country Club was sold for development of houses, Huyler's Landing Road, the old name, was restored to a road that generally follows the route of the original road to the top of the East Hill. Today, from that vantage point one can see the valley below as early settlers did--and as invading troops did in 1776.

5

The Years Leading to Incorporation

The arrival in 1859 of the Northern Railroad of New Jersey brought greater changes to Cresskill than had any other single event. Prior to 1859, horses or farm wagons were used to reach the landing and a boat to New York. Stagecoaches, at top speeds of four to six miles per hour, traveled on present-day County Road, with the Huyler's Landing Road stop an important way station for weary travelers to stretch and shake off dust.

The railroad provided quick and easy access to remote, rural Bergen from the budding metropolis across the river. But in the decade after the railroad arrived, real estate speculators made and lost fortunes when they bought up land along the railroad for development, all the while thinking of the new type of residents they expected would settle there: the businessmen who would live in the country and work in the city--commuters. Land speculators found it dif-

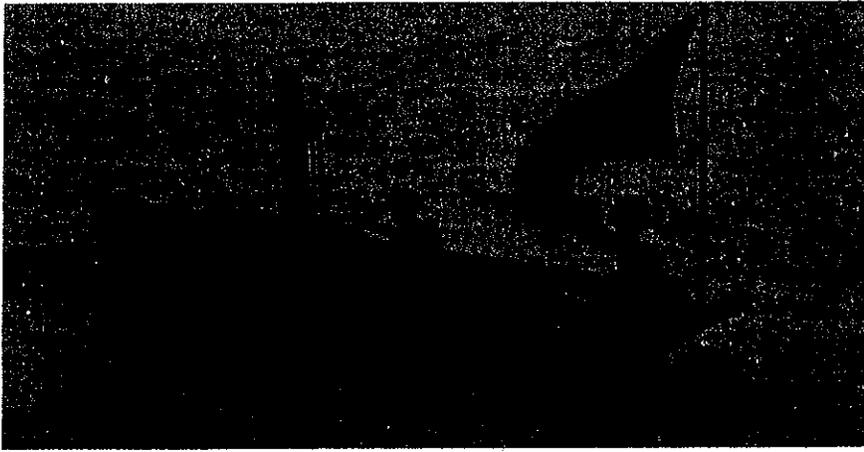
ficult, however, to sell land in a town with the unappealing name of Lower Closter, as the railroad stop was then called, to differentiate it from Closter, to the north. The land salesmen were among the first to press for a distinctive name for the town that would soon assume its new position as a borough. And so was coined the town's name, Cresskill--"cress," for the watercress that grew wild and abundantly along the streams, and "kill," meaning brook.

Land development companies, promoting the "new" territories opened by the railroad, ran stories and ads in New York newspapers. One, an article from the *New York Daily Tribune* of April 12, 1869, read: "The village of Cresskill was commenced about 6 years ago. Its situation is similar to that of the other space spoken of on the Northern Railroad of New Jersey. It contains one store, one school, a church, two parks, a fine slate roof

depot, and a blacksmith shop and a wheelright shop and one debating club. Several streets and avenues have been laid out and further improvements are contemplated. Property has increased \$300 per acre in three years. Lots 50 x 100 ft. are selling at from \$150 to \$800 each. Lots situated within three minutes' walk of the depot can be purchased for \$600 to \$800. . . . Building plots of three to five acres are each worth \$8,000 to \$10,000. Distance to Jersey City Ferry 17 min. Six daily trains leave each way. Yearly rates--\$88.50.

Unlike what might have occurred a hundred years later, six years after the *Daily Tribune's* 1869 article appeared, the fare rates had dropped and were quoted as "Eleven trains daily. Rates: One way--45¢; Round Trip--85¢; One month--\$11.50; One year--\$77.50."

The Civil War affected the area that would become Cresskill relatively little.



The Naptha Launch sails near Huyler's Landing in the 1880s.

Most people in the north-eastern part of New Jersey, who were mainly of Dutch extraction and who worshipped in the Dutch Reformed Church, had few scruples regarding slavery, as did the Quakers, who lived in the southern portion of the state. Most people in Bergen County voted Democratic, supported the *Bergen County Democrat* as their newspaper of choice, voted against Lincoln for president, opposed the Emancipation Proclamation, and were influenced by what were called Copperheads--northerners who opposed the war or who favored the southern cause and who, like the snake, might strike without warning. Blacks from the Bergen County area who wanted to fight for the North had to go to Connecticut or other states to enlist.

A Cresskill resident, Abraham G. Demarest, who owned a hardware store in Cresskill and later one in Tenafly, commanded the 22nd Regiment and worked his way up to the rank of colonel.

By 1876, Cresskill's eventual status as a suburban community was foreshadowed by the compilers of the Bergen County Atlas, who described the community as follows: "The village of Cresskill lies in valley a short distance above Tenafly, The depot is a neat wooden building nicely situated opposite a pretty park, and surrounded by several rows of fine trees. The village was named from the fact that along the Tenakill, watercress in great abundance grew, and the brook at this place localized into Cress-kill thus suggesting the village name. There are many beautiful drives through this neighborhood. . . There are many beautiful residences here of New York business and professional men."

The railroad created a business environment in what was to become Cresskill, including the largest chicken hatchery in the world, at the site of present-day North Crest Drive and South Crest Drive. In 1879 the New Jersey State Poultry Society reported to the State Board of Agriculture

that this hatchery had a capacity for turning out 10,000 chickens a week, 200,000 a year, and that it had been created at a cost of \$75,000. W. R. Boker had invented a gas incubator that created a carefully controlled environment for the breeding and raising of chickens and thus contributed to the farm economy of the Garden State--as well as to that of Cresskill.

As incorporation as a separate borough neared, local businessmen were beginning to use the railroad to commute to the big city across the river. But many were still employed locally: working at the chicken hatchery; operating farms; running the town and maintaining its roads, school, and shops; and, for the women, caring for their homes and children.

Several of the roads that are now major arteries in the town--County Road, and Grant, Madison, Hillside, Union, and Jefferson avenues--were in existence one hundred years ago and held some of the finest homes in town, then and now.

With the railroad bringing industry and new residents to the area, and with the several hundred people who sent their children to the schools and paid school taxes wanting more control of their local schools, the people of the region that would be called Cresskill were ready to declare themselves a town. And in the spring of 1894 five dozen or so men undertook to do just that.

6

May 11, 1894

What happened on May 11, 1894, the date of Cresskill's incorporation as a borough? How did Cresskill come into being?

Twenty-nine days before, on April 12, 1894, a number of citizens acted upon their belief that the area where they lived should be a separate borough, more than a town in name only--Cresskill. As was the rest of the country, they were caught in the carryover of the financial panic of 1893. They were paying school taxes, but as a longtime part of Palisades Township they had no local control. The financial hardships they were undergoing made their resolve to separate from the Township all the stronger. They petitioned the "Hon. Judge James M. Van Valen, Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, of the County of Bergen, in the State of New Jersey" for the purpose of incorporating as a borough to be known as "The Mayor and Council of the Borough of Cresskill." (The name

"The Mayor and Council of the Borough of Cresskill" remained until December 10, 1903, when the Mayor and Council under Mayor Frederick W. Schaaf voted to change the name to "The Borough of Cresskill.")

The petitioning members of the community had to prove that together they owned "at least one tenth of the value of the taxable Real Estate within the limits of the proposed borough" and that "the taxable Real Estate in said limits exceeds One Hundred Thousand Dollars in assessed value, [t]hat the territories within the boundaries . . . does not exceed in area four square miles, and that the population . . . exceeds Three Hundred and does not exceed five thousand."

The petition of incorporation, together with a map of the proposed borough, was submitted, and election notices were posted in ten public places, including the Charles Blauvelt Store, Cresskill Hall at the corner of Jefferson and

Madison Avenues (not to be confused with the first borough hall, which was on Grant Avenue), and Demarest and Allaire's Real Estate Office.

On May 11 the borough was incorporated when "the number of ballots cast was Sixty four, 14 against incorporation giving a majority of Thirty six for incorporation." (Mssrs. W. A. Tallman and Christie Westervelt signed the incorporation, but neither, apparently, noticed that their mathematics was faulty.)

The men of Cresskill were not unique, however, in their courageous act to strike out alone as an incorporated borough. Altogether, twenty-six towns in Bergen County incorporated as boroughs in the year 1894.

James H. Ferdon was elected the first mayor on an uncontested non-partisan ticket. James's son John was chosen councilman for a three-year term. In addition, four West-

ervelts were elected-- Benjamin J. for a three-year council term, William H. for a two-year council term, and Henry V. for a one-year council term. John P.B. Westervelt became the commissioner of appeal.

Not to be outdone by these prominent families, the Tallmans also contributed time and concern to the new borough's administration. William A. was elected to the council for a one-year term, and Egbert became the borough collector.

Others elected were Eugene D. Voorhis as councilman for a two-year term, Aaron D. Demarest as assessor, and A. C. Worth and Frederick W. Schaaf as commissioners of appeal.

These worthy gentlemen met in the first borough hall, on Grant Avenue, as did all Mayor and Councils after them until the site of their operations was moved after World War I to a new building at the site of the present-day Borough Hall on Union Avenue.

The borough's voters approved an appropriation of \$1,500 for road purposes and \$500 for borough purposes. Taxes were collected from the beginning. In 1896, George Kervis paid a tax bill of \$12.80 for one acre of land valued at \$500.00.

The first municipal agency to meet as a board was the Board of Health, which met on a weekly basis in Demarest and Allaire's

Real Estate Office.

The town's "second school" was then located on East Madison Avenue, near to where present-day Legion Drive is. Across the street was the blacksmith shop of J. F. Haring.

At the turn of the century, the Louis Mores General Store stood at the northeast corner of Railroad Avenue (present-day Piermont Avenue) and Union Avenue, near the railroad station. Mr. Mores advertised his store as a place where one could buy anything "from a needle to an anchor." Its pot-bellied stove and cracker barrel attracted Cresskill's 300 or so residents, who used the store as a focal point of social activity. But the ladies

While sixty-four of Cresskill's citizens were voting to incorporate as a borough on Tuesday, May 11, 1894, what was happening elsewhere, what could you buy and how much would it cost, and what gossip was being reported in the county papers?

You could subscribe to the *Hackensack Republican* for "One Year, Invariably in Advance" for \$1.00. In it, you would find an advertisement for "The Peerless Churn and Butter Washer"; the "Newest Creations in Trimmed Bonnets and Hats," including "All Shades in Crystal Cloth and Batiste"; and "Names put on Dog Collars, cheap," by a jeweler in Hackensack.

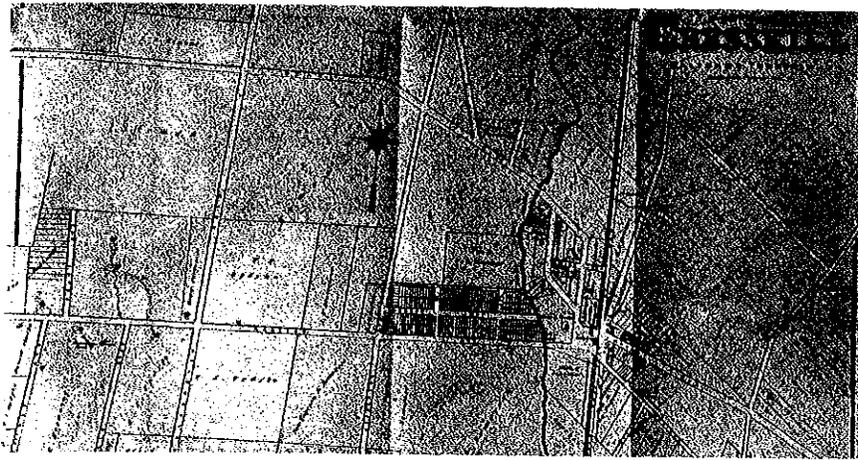
Not to be outdone, the *Bergen County Democrat* ran, among its ads, one for "Dr. Decker's Shakes and Malaria Cure"--an honest medicine; another for an auction at Madison Square Garden for "150 head of trotting stock and harness horses"; and "turkey eggs for hatching at \$1.00 per setting." Antique buffs of today would have jumped at the classified ad for a "Hall Clock, in fine condition, inlaid mahogany case, over one hundred years old, old style brass trimmings" (no price was listed).

This same newspaper, on May 25, 1894, sounded a warning in light of the number of new boroughs that were being formed in that year: "When the seven Boroughs now in process of construction complete their organization, the Board of Chosen Freeholders will be composed of 24 members, instead of 17 as now constituted. In addition to the list of freeholders, there will be a large addition to the force of assessors, collectors, boards of health and

clerks. It does not take an arithmetician to cipher out the inevitable increase in the cost of government, nor will it take a very wise man to understand that all this means increased taxation which is now inordinately high, growing out of the heavy balance of war debt which will remain an incubus for years to come, and the large amount of money which has yet to be spent upon permanent road improvements which cannot be got rid of. The question may well be asked, are we not going a little too fast in the creation of new boroughs?"

The New York Times on its front page of a May 1894 morning reported that ex-President [Benjamin] Harrison spent a quiet day [the previous day] at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, that he had had breakfast, disposed of his mail and read the newspapers, and then strolled alone up Fifth Avenue, returning in time for luncheon, after which he received a number of callers. Pencil sketches of other distinguished gentlemen accompanied stories about their doings.

A long list of classified ads under Situations Wanted--Females indicated that laundresses were available, many of them willing to assist with chamberwork and several of whom, German or northern European, spoke no English. Presumably, some of these young ladies found their way to towns such as Cresskill, as their ads read that they were willing to work in the city or the country.



Above: Map illustrates Cresskill during the late 1880s.

Said election having been held this day and at the place designated in said order and conducted by us after taking and subscribing an oath to honestly and impartially hold said election and the ballots cast at said election having been by us canvassed, we hereby certify that the whole number of ballots cast, was Eighty Four (84) Against Incorporation Giving a majority of thirty six (36) For Incorporation

Witness our hands this 3rd day of May 1894.

J. A. Tallman
 Charles H. Hinton
 (Inspector)

Geo. D. Miller
 Poll Clerk

Right: A portion of the Articles of Incorporation for Cresskill.

of Cresskill did not have to do their own food marketing: The store's three delivery wagons made the rounds of the borough, stopping at customers' homes to take the day's orders, which were delivered in the afternoon. Mr. Mores, who became the postmaster, volunteered his wagons as well to deliver chairs, china-ware, silver, and the like, to homes when lawn parties, christenings, weddings, and entertaining were to be held. When folks needed to make a telephone call, it was to Mr. Mores's store that they came, to use one

James Ferdon, Cresskill's first mayor, owned at least two parcels of land in the borough. One, located at the present-day northeast corner of Grant Avenue and Cottage Place, was valued at \$200. Ferdon paid \$2.56 in taxes on this land. In today's market, this would be worth somewhat more than \$100,000 with a tax price of just over \$2,000. It is the other parcel, however, north of Grant Avenue and west of present-day Brookside Avenue, that would have made Ferdon an exceedingly rich man in 1994. Its value of \$5,000 in 1894 would translate to about \$1 million now, a hundred years later, and would cost him about \$22,000 in taxes.

of the few telephones in town. And it was the town's children who delivered the messages from incoming calls. There were five Mores daughters, all born around the time of incorporation and of whom three--Mary, who was her father's assistant, Daisy, and Dolly--later helped out in the store. Some of the sisters continued to live in their mid-nineteenth century home at 91 Hillside Avenue until Adele Mores died in the 1980s. Although there was no church in town in 1894, an undenominational Sunday school had been operating for 38 years. Townsfolk would attend church in neighboring towns for another ten years after incorporation. Arthur Atwood, who was a student in the borough's school in the 1890s, recalled

in a letter in 1957, shortly before his death: "How comfortable and inviting the Dutch homesteads looked. Here in the business center of our little town of about 300 voters was the John McKell Saw Mill on the north side of Union Avenue. Just back about 300 feet from the north side of Union Avenue were several little houses and Colonel Blauvelt's Variety and Grocery Store, forming the business section. A wooden corduroy sidewalk stretched all the way down from County Road, one half mile to the railroad station. . . . There it was, this new little town of Cresskill, in the mid-1890s, raising taxes and passing laws to give its people comfort and protection, seeking to educate its young, trying to support its businesses while keeping as much of the rural atmosphere of the village as it could--not all that much different from the little town of Cresskill in the mid-1990s.

The Turn of the Century

The fledgling town was dealing with its new government and with the changes the railroad had brought to it, yet the newly incorporated borough lost none of its country charm.

Those people not using the railroad to commute to work could find employment locally, at F. C. Linde, a lock and key company large enough to have provided the locks and escutcheons for the Wyoming state capital, as well as with nearby businesses just over the border in Demarest. The Westervelt Coal Company boasted a turntable just north of Union Avenue that could accommodate one coal car, which then had to be rotated by hand to position it to dump the coal in the proper place. The Cresskill Lumber Company, built by George Zabriskie, who lived on Knickerbocker Road (which was a dirt road with three houses on it) began its operation at the turn of the century, at the site where Hoke is today, and

continued until World War I. Zabriskie later was president of the Pillsbury Flour Company.

Even the Northern Railroad of New Jersey, which brought Cresskill into the outside world while making that outside world aware of it as a depot, became an employer of Cresskill folks. Cresskill resident Erven Smith became the agent in his hometown station in 1902 at a salary of \$40 per month.

But the retail stores near the intersections of Union Avenue and Railroad Avenue, present-day Piermont Road, were where the townfolk gathered to shop and to chat. The Mores' General Store was there, as was the post office. Postmasters in those days were prominent citizens, often knowing all the goings on of the town's residents. Of the early postmasters, William Mayer went on to become a borough tax collector and Raymond McGrath a mayor.

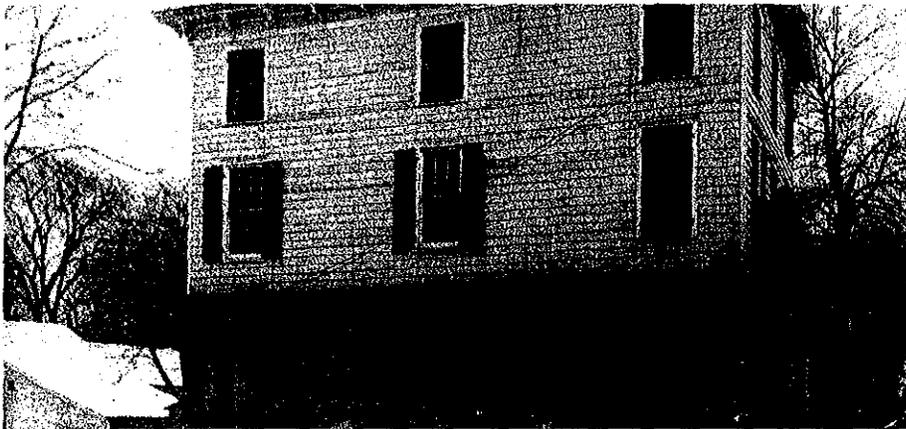
Present-day Cresskill's

street names are dignified, often bearing the surname of one of the country's presidents--Washington, Hoover, Truman, Eisenhower--or a reference to nature--Palisade, Elmwood, Holly, Morningside. Few of today's names, however, are as descriptive as some of the street names used in the early 1900s: Jefferson Avenue was known as Love Lane, Westervelt Place was Chicken Row, and Lambs Lane was Cow Path.

Lambs Lane, a private road from its beginning, was developed by the Lamb family. In 1857 Joseph Lamb, a native of Scotland and an artist in the forefront of the Arts and Crafts Movement, had built a lodge--aptly named Falcon Lodge--on top of the Palisades, about where Huyler's Landing Road passed. Until 1903, when the land passed to the new borough of Alpine, the lodge was within the borough of Cresskill. To reach his country retreat, the elderly Lamb had his two sons row



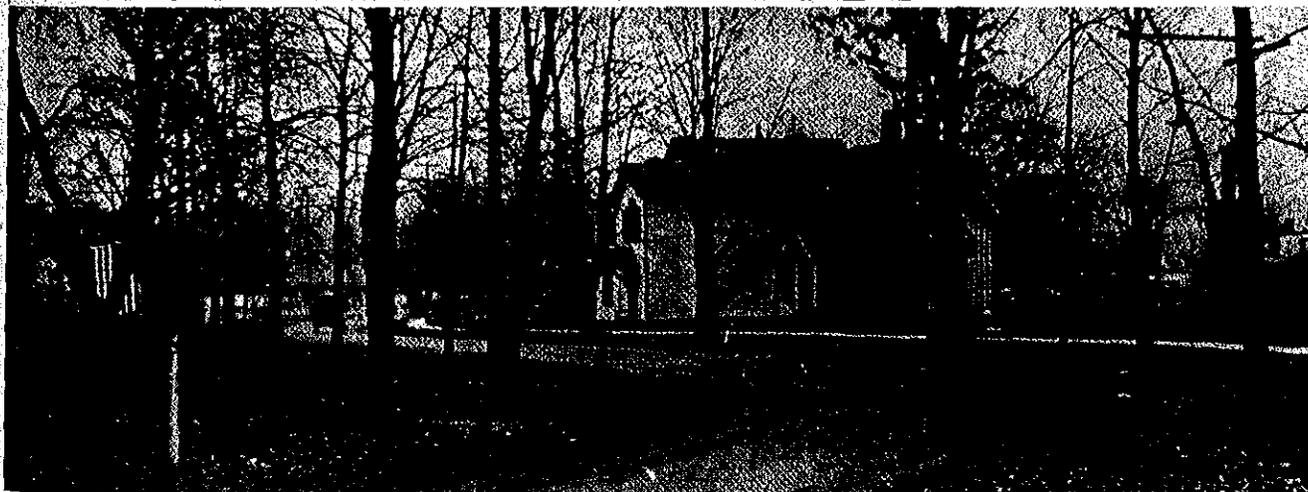
Above: Cresskill's railroad station at the turn of the century. Tavern is at right.



Left: The Prospect House, owned by Edward Short.



Left: Looking north on Mezzine Drive at the turn of the century.

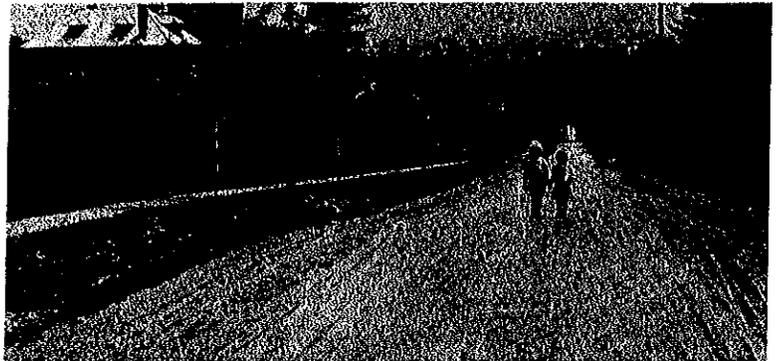


Below: Cresskill's first Borough Hall at the bend of the eastern end of Grant Avenue.

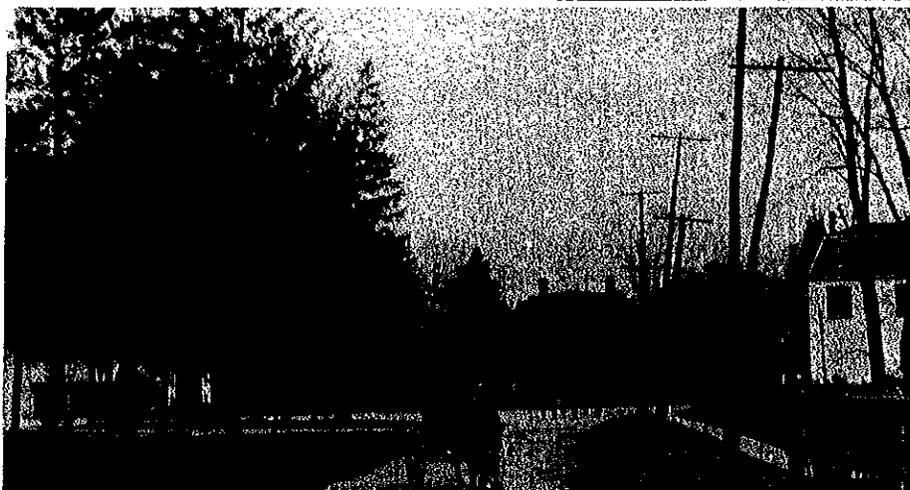
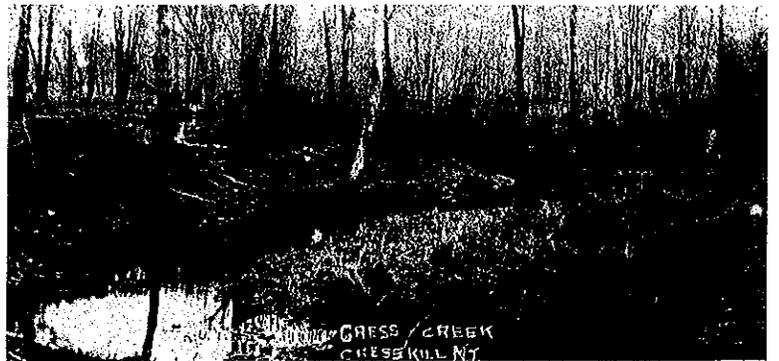


Above: An 1856 view of Cresskill's railroad station area looking northwest. The building at far right is Mores' general store; the third building from right is the Prospect House, an inn; the building at far left is the Tallman House (see page 153). Railroad Avenue runs parallel to the white fence in foreground.

Right: Madison Avenue (Cedar or Red Hill) looking east from the top of the hill at the turn of the century.



Right: An early view of the Tenakill, then also called Cress Creek.



Left: Madison Avenue looking east toward present-day Veterans Square.

him across the Hudson from his home in New York City each weekend. The Lamb family's stained glass and other church artifacts, renowned worldwide, were considered finer yet than the Tiffany work of the same period. The Lambs' work can be seen today in the windows of Riverside Church in New York City. Joseph Lamb's two sons were the first to build on Lambs Lane, at the top of the steep hill, Frederick on the right in 1894 and Charles on the left in 1899. To extend this artists' colony still further, Charles's wife, Ella Condie Lamb, a prizewinning painter and designer, also had a studio on the lane. This studio was later expanded for her daughter, Katherine.

Katherine Lamb Tait, Charles and Ella's daughter, was born in 1895 at her grandfather's retreat, Falcon Lodge. Her fame, like her grandfather's, father's, and uncle's, was world famous. Much of her designing, which included more than 1,000 church windows, was done in her Lambs Lane home, with the execution of her designs completed at the Lamb studio in Tenafly. For Cresskill, she designed the boulder in front of the Merritt Memorial School and the plaque at the base of the Merritt Memorial.

Lamb's Lane stretched up into the eastern hills of Cresskill, but in the town itself the Prospect House and the Willow Tree Inn operated in the early 1900s. The Prospect House, north

and west of the intersection of Union and Railroad (present-day Piermont Road) avenues, was operated by Edward Short, a mayor of Cresskill and the father of one of Cresskill's five police chiefs.

The Willow Tree Inn, with its three rooms upstairs and its bar downstairs, was owned by one B. Von Stein, who had purchased a wagon works owned by Aaron Demarest and set up the inn in that building. The inn, later owned by the Cook family, who were prominent in Cresskill, was located at the corner of Willow Street, named for the huge trees that grew there. William Cook, a longtime superintendent of the Department of Public Works, recalled the inn during his boyhood, "There was no central heating in the building, and it groaned. It was scary." When the building was razed, the lumber was used to build a house on Madison Avenue.

To define the "business district," a wooden sidewalk ran the length of Union Avenue from County Road to Railroad Avenue. Along it and Railroad Avenue were a butcher shop, a cider mill, a barrel-making shop, a blacksmith shop, and a hardware store. Of some importance was a "chain" store in town before the 1920s, recalls Gladys Pendergast, who came to Cress-

The Northern Railroad of New Jersey, which came to Cresskill in 1959, later became known as the Erie Railroad. In 1868 the company moved from the Jersey City terminal of the Central Railroad of New Jersey to the Erie terminal. In 1969 the company was leased to the Erie Railroad. At that time they had eight locomotives, fifteen passenger cars, six baggage cars, and thirty freight cars.

Lynd Ward and May McNeer

There was another artist who lived on Lambs Lane in the early to mid-twentieth century. Where the Lamb family was known nationwide for its stained-glass designs and executions, Lynd Ward was a distinguished name in the field of book illustration, and especially of children's books.

Lynd Ward won the Caldecott Medal for his illustration of *The Biggest Bear*. In his book *The Silver Pony* he used no words. His illustrations alone told the gentle story of the little boy who finds adventure and understanding of the world beyond his own with the help of a winged pony.

Ward was a draftsman and a book designer as well as an illustrator, working often with woodcuts. Before beginning his work on children's books, both as artist and as author, he illustrated *The America's Series*; "Paul Revere," "Ethan Allen," and "Robert E. Lee." Much of his work was done in collaboration with his wife, author May McNeer.

The Wards spent three seasons of the year in their Cresskill home, in a Lamb house on the south side of Lambs Lane. They spent their summers in Ontario, Canada, where *The Biggest Bear* is set. But they didn't ignore their aerie in Cresskill; it became the setting for *The Wolf of Lamb's Lane*.

chain, which consisted of several grocery stores, was called James Butler and was run by a manager on the south side of Union Avenue.

But cows still grazed nearby, as they did in every country town. Muth's Dairy was located on Westervelt Place, and Ackerman Dairy, which operated into the 1960s, was located on the west side of County Road, between Union and Park avenues.

In 1908 the first Cresskill students--two--received their diplomas in the auditorium of the new school, the Orchard Street School, which was later renamed after its longtime principal, Edward H. Bryan. By 1916 the number of graduates had tripled.

The town's population

grew too, but slowly. In the first decade of the new century its number grew from 486 to 550 residents.

The Borough Hall, then called the Town Hall, was still located on the south side of Grant Avenue, east of the railroad station. At that time the building on Union Avenue that was to become the Borough Hall for nearly fifty years housed a Young Men's Association, which flourished from the early 1900s through World War I.

By 1911 the newly formed Cresskill Volunteer Firemen's Association built its first firehouse, on Union Avenue, on ground it purchased for \$75. Three years later the building afforded meeting space for the mayor and council and for the Women's Suffrage Movement.

Cresskill was still a quiet, all-but-forgotten small town, nestled in Bergen County away from the hubbub of the city across the river. Few people outside the immediate vicinity had heard its quaint name; fewer still had visited it. The railroad ran through it, making its scheduled stops several times a day, but the commuters on the passenger trains and the workers on the freight trains rarely looked up to give the town a glance. Cresskill's residents went about their business, rarely seeing more than a few outsiders on their streets.

World War I would change Cresskill, as it changed the world.

A Horse Named Bob

Daisy Mores, one of the five daughters who helped their father operate his grocery in Cresskill, was featured in a nationally distributed newspaper when her courage enabled her to trap a horse thief.

It was 1914. Daisy was 24 years old.

A vegetable vendor whose route extended from Jersey City to Nyack often found himself in Cresskill around twilight. He knew the Mores, who were friendly people, and frequently asked them to put him up for the night, which they did, in their barn. It didn't take them long, however, to find that the man was helping himself to their supply of oats for his own horse and that he left behind litter after he cleared out his wagon. Finally, Mrs. Mores scolded the man for his behavior.

On the following trip, the man left early in the morning. Later, the Mores discovered that one of their horses, Bob, was missing. It was evident who had taken Bob.

The Mores looked for Bob with help from other townspeople, but Bob was nowhere in the vicinity. Finally, Daisy said she was sure she would find Bob at an auction service in New York City. The others tried to dissuade her, but Daisy said "she had a feeling" she would find the horse there.

When she arrived at the auction house she saw a horse she was sure was Bob being hitched to a wagon. Tar had been applied to several small scars in an effort to disguise distinguishing marks.

She offered the horse a lump of sugar and said, "Hey, Bob, what do you say?" With those words, the horse raised his front foot. That was Daisy's proof.

She declared to the auction-house owner that this was her horse and that he had been stolen. She offered as proof Bob's trick of raising his foot, which he repeated on command.

The owner made reparation to the man who had just purchased the horse from him and arranged to trap the vegetable vendor who had brought him the stolen horse. The thief was to return the following week to pick up his ill-gotten money. Daisy returned, and with police nearby, stayed out of sight until the man returned and asked for his money. She identified him, and justice was done.

Her story appeared in the old *New York World* and was syndicated throughout the country. Hundreds of approving letters--and several proposals of marriage--came in after the newspaper story. Daisy did get married, but not to one of her news-story admirers.

And Bob lived out a good life with the Mores, still raising his foot when offered a lump of sugar and given the magic words.

Fire Control in Cresskill

They're a proud bunch, these firefighters. And rightly so. Proud of their volunteerism, proud of their knowledge, proud of their ability, proud of being, for a hundred years, of such importance to Cresskill.

Forty-five men--to date there have been no women firefighters on the Cresskill Volunteer Fire Department--18 years old and up with no upper limit to age, comprise the department. Their lives are on the line each time they answer a fire call, more so today than ever before. Because there is more possibility of accelerants and of hazardous materials in a burning home or business, the men are in danger not only from fire and smoke but from exposure to toxins.

The time they give, every moment of it voluntary, is far beyond what the public actually sees when the firefighters respond to fire signals or perhaps when the men trot out the fire trucks for driver training on a Sunday morning.

But behind the fire calls lie hours of work: fire drills twice a month; maintenance of the equipment and cleanup of the apparatus room, once a month for each firefighter; and a meeting every month. Thirty of the firefighters attend every function required of them, according to Chris Bonanno, who was interviewed when he was fire chief. And this, says, Rob Ahearn, the current fire chief, is a higher percentage than ever before in the department's history.

Still, says Rob, the biggest problem the department faces is recruiting new volunteers. There's less willingness to volunteer, for firefighting or for anything else in the community (or any community) and, says Rob, the men now in the department are younger than 35 and older than 55, thus cutting off the chance of recruiting the sons and daughters of firemen, as has been the case in the past. A junior volunteer program, for 16-to-18 year olds, had brought in as many as 15 teenagers in a year for more than 20 years. Currently, however, there are only two junior firefighters, Anthony Triant and Bill Radin. It's Bill that the department is especially excited about. "He's our first volunteer from up on the hill [Rio Vista]," Rob says. "We're having trouble getting volunteers, but there's Bill, being chauffeured by the maid in his family's Jaguar, volunteering."

All these monthly requirements follow a 135-hour fire training course, a 24-hour hazardous-material training course, and a year's probation while learning the procedures of the fire department. No wonder they're as close-knit a group as they are, these brave and largely unsung volunteers.

That's training for a basic firefighter. For the person who aspires to be a driver--and this is not a matter of just sitting behind the wheel of the huge rig--there is an additional training course that lasts 40 hours. After that, the driver is able to operate the rescue/ladder truck.

To become an officer--a lieutenant or a captain--the firefighter must pass the driver's course plus an additional 30 hours of training. To go further still, say, to assistant chief, the volunteer firefighter must take the training for driver and for officer, plus yet another 45-hour course and other courses as well. Chief? All the foregoing, adding up finally to about 500 to 600 hours of training. "Chief is not just a matter of prestige," says Bonanno. And it's still all volunteer. As chief, he says, he spent about 17 hours a week, either in the firehouse, doing paper work and ordering material, or on the outside on public relations work, such as talks to the PTA or to schoolchildren.

Much of the subject of those talks concern fire safety. There have been fatalities in house fires in Cresskill, and the men don't forget them: the carpenter on Magnolia Avenue, in the eighties; the elderly woman in a house that exploded on Broadway--an experience that still sends shudders through the firefighters, who remember the accelerants in the house and the flames shooting out of the middle of the long, narrow building.

The incumbent chief is there for every house fire. Elmer Bogert was the first chief, from 1908 to 1914 and again from 1922 to 1930. Charles V.B. Westervelt was a chief, and Lester DeVries, a Cresskill police officer and later police chief, who began the continuing tradition of a two-year term for the chief. Keith Brigley, chief in 1982, oversaw six house fires--more than the usual number--during his term and was heard to say that in every instance the fire was somehow the fault of the residents.

A century ago the fire department began with a hand pump but soon progressed to horse-drawn equipment. A couple of hoops with a sledge hammer hung near them constituted the fire alarm. The number of times the hammer struck the hoops indicated the general location of the fire. The hoops were struck by the first person who came by after the fire was reported.

The Volunteer Fire Association was formed in 1906, about the time the first firehouse was built on Union Avenue, at the corner of Allen Street, and has worked alongside the department ever since. Three years later the borough purchased an 1858 jumper, a hand-drawn fire apparatus with two large

An early picture of the firehouse on Union Avenue. In the front row are, left to right, John Ullrich, Elmer Bogert, Godfrey Phillips, Eli Racich, Mayor Edward Short, and Oliver Pratt. Man at extreme right and those in back row are not identified. Note that the house at the left is still standing on Allen Street.



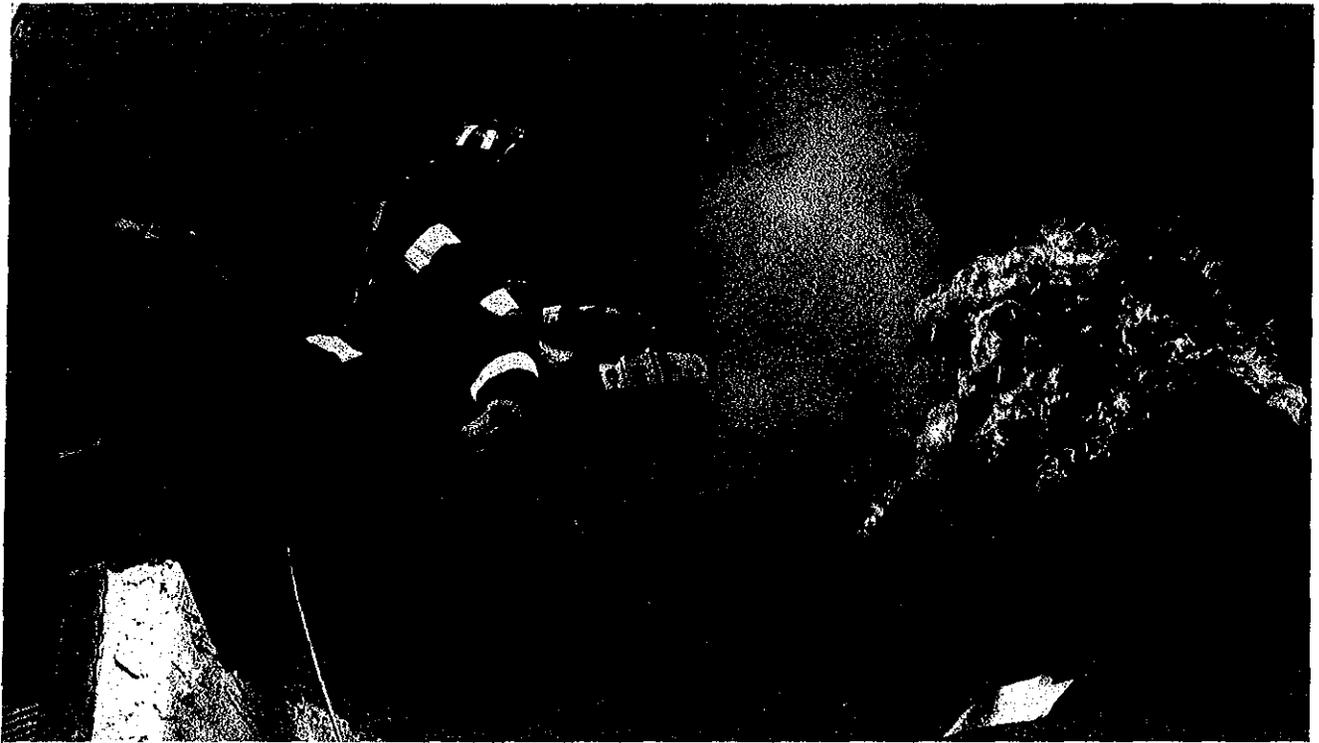
wheels and two shafts, for \$5.00. Previously, equipment had consisted of tin pails, fire hose, kerosene lanterns, brass polish, axle grease, a 20-foot ladder, and a wagon to carry all of it to fires. The Mayor and Council denied a request for the purchase of a horse to haul fire apparatus. Firemen had to commandeer the nearest available steed for fast action, and frequently this horse belonged to Phil Flotard, who charged \$3 horse rental. When he wasn't available, the men had to get between the shafts of the fire wagon--which had a box attached to it with two reels of hose, the nozzles, and all the other paraphernalia--and pull it to the fire. They were willing to pull the red wagon with the CFD painted on it everywhere, according to Leon Traubel, who moved to Cresskill as a child early in the century and who was interviewed in 1988. But the firemen balked at pulling it up the hill to the very top of Madison Avenue. "Everybody imaginable pulled, everybody was a horse," he said. "But then," he added, "everyone belonged to the fire department in them days, and there weren't many fires." He recalled also that when luck would have it Elmer Bogert, a plumber and one of the few people in town with an automobile, one that was cranked on the side, was available and would pull the jumper up Madison Avenue. Water was pumped from the few hydrants in town.

Now there is still a 1939 pumper fire truck in one corner of the firehouse on Madison Avenue. It's not used anymore, but it's in sharp contrast to the 35-foot, state-of-the art combination rescue-engine and ladder truck, its ladder reaching to 80 feet and the truck containing specialized rescue equipment: ropes, jaws of life, air bags, hazardous-materials equipment--everything that could be needed for any emergency. For every one of the components to work, it requires a gauge, a lever, a switch, a pulley--hundreds of them, complicated ones--

complicated enough to require the 40 hours of training that the driver needs to operate this behemoth. And its cost is a far cry from the \$5.00 jumper--\$292,000. It took 28 meetings of a 10-person truck committee and two days at two conventions to study available equipment before the decision was made to purchase this amazing vehicle. Besides this, there is a smaller rescue engine.

The Borough owns the equipment--trucks, fire-fighting gear--that is used for fighting fires. And the Association owns the firehouse, which was built in 1955 at its present location on Madison Avenue after the Fire Department was housed for years at a building on Union Avenue, at the corner of Allen Street. The firefighters give more than their time. They pay dues to their Association, which pays for utilities and maintenance of the firehouse, and they are always aware that jumping into fire gear when they are called out while wearing a good suit or a good watch will almost surely ruin those items, what with smoke and water damage. They get a \$400 clothing allowance, but they agree that it doesn't always cover their losses.

It's evident that they don't really care. They care about fighting fires. Though recruiting new volunteers is an ongoing problem, those people who are firefighters are committed to their cause. Of the 45 men now on the squad, six--Mike Van Tine, Pete DeVries, John Stuart, John Pontician, Jr., Bob Ben-setter, Glenn Dillinger--are sons of current or former Cresskill volunteer firemen; their fathers currently on the force are Colin Van Tine, Sr., and Al Dillinger, each with nearly 40 years' experience as Cresskill firefighters, and John Pontician, Sr., with nearly 30 years experience. Other longtimers are Howie Tiedemann, Artie Pressler--a Cresskill police officer and father of two firefighters in other communities--and Mario Triveri, all of whom joined the volunteer group in the mid-1950s. Mario Spola, Henry Dick-



Cresskill's volunteer firefighters John Stuart, with the chain saw, and Carl Wallin brave flames and smoke at a house fire on Twelfth Street on April 2, 1986.

man, Gene Mincieli, and Ted Trozinski--whose interest was aroused when he was on the council--have been on the force for two or three decades. Several are brothers of current or former volunteers: Keith Brigley, Rob Ryan, Joe Spina, Bob Bonanno (Chris' older brother and a former councilman), and Mike Morrison (who's Van Tine's brother-in-law). Most of the young men grew up in Cresskill and many joined as junior firemen in the seventies: Jim Moran, Carl Wallin, Glenn Petillo (who's a member of the Cresskill Police Department), Scott Kraus, Scott Johnson, Chris Black, Kevin Peter, Tom Lepore, Neil Hartmann, Ed Fischer, Mike Breen, Kenny Soule, Kevin Giannantonio, Cliff Cernak, and Devon Chase. Kenny Mann was a fireman in another borough before moving to Cresskill, as was Richie Paulos. Jeff Guenther moved to Cresskill and joined the squad as a new experience in his life. Ten of the current firefighters served as chief before Bonnano: Pressler, both Van Tines, Al Dillinger, Spola, Brigley, Petillo, and DeVries.

Rob Ahearn is not only Cresskill's current fire chief. He's a young man who, as a child, captured Cresskill's heart and personified the town's char-

acter. His dad, a Cresskill police lieutenant, died of a heart attack while serving at the police desk--when Rob was 6 years old. Bud Ahearn, an affable and well-liked man, left little Robbie and his wife and two older sons, 15 and 20 years old. Nine years later, Rob's mother died of cancer, and Rob went to live with his middle brother. Rob joined the fire department as a junior volunteer a year later. He says now that the warmth and camaraderie, "like a family," of being a member of the fire department was one of the things that helped most during his difficult time.

Sure, the men complain--about smoke and water damage to their clothes when they are called out wearing a suit, about clothing allowances that don't cover that damage, about lack of community involvement and interest. But the committed ones drop in to the firehouse even when they're not on duty. They do odd jobs around the firehouse, they talk, they reinforce their commitment to each other. And when their beeper sounds, when the fire siren blares, it hits them with a sense of urgency to get there, to help--a feeling beyond what most of us have experienced. It hits them in the gut; it's in their blood. Next to their families, it's their life.

The War to End All Wars

Cresskill was to thousands of brave--and frightened--young men--many not much beyond boyhood--the last town they would see on American soil before they shipped out to fight a war on another continent.

America's largest army embarkation camp during World War I, erected in a matter of weeks in Cresskill and in Dumont, put Cresskill on the national map. Camp Merritt, a collection of more than 1,200 buildings over some 770 acres, was named to honor the late Major General Wesley Merritt, an 1860 graduate of West Point and later the superintendent of the Academy. Merritt's, and the camp's, name lives on in a street at the southernmost section of the borough, in the elementary school, in the borough's American Legion post, and most notably in the graceful monument on Knickerbocker Road, a landmark both for automobiles driving past it around the circle and for planes flying overhead. The

monument, with its plaque designed by Katherine Lamb Tait, marks the center of where Camp Merritt was located.

It was 1917, in the midst of the "war to end all wars," when the federal government found the Cresskill-Dumont area surrounding the site of the present-day monument, then with only dirt roads running through heavy woods, as the ideal spot to build a camp that was close to the Hoboken port of embarkation with its rail and ship facilities.

And build they did. It seemed, in August 1917, that an instant city had appeared. Among the 1,200 buildings were a large hospital, a bakery, and a "de-lousing" plant that could process 260 men an hour. The camp had a capacity of 44,500 men and cost \$11 million to build. The camp proper covered 580 acres, and warehouses, railway spurs, and athletic fields covered another 190. There were 60 acres of truck gardens to produce food for the

many mess halls. Even the firehouse on Union Avenue was used--as an off-post station by military police and for recreation for the doughboys, as they were called, passing through the camp.

The camp utilized a large part of Cresskill's acreage, east of Knickerbocker from the Tenafly border to the Demarest border, and it extended equally as far into Dumont. It could be reached by train, both the Erie Railroad in Cresskill and the West Shore Railroad in Dumont. It would cost a visitor taking a train into Tenafly ten cents for a bus or fifteen cents for a taxi to get to the camp. The facilities were divided into seven districts, each one with its own district commander. The camp headquarters and the post office were on Madison Avenue. Although the base hospital was primarily in Dumont, attached to it was the Red Cross House for Convalescents, which was on Knickerbocker Road at Ma-

ple Street. The morgue was located nearby. Officers were quartered in the house where Quirk Funeral Home is today. The locksmith shop was at Eighth Street on Madison Avenue with a drinking fountain outside it, Bill Cook recalls. The stable was further down Madison Avenue, near where Orchard Street (Brookside Avenue) was. Years later, youngsters playing at building lots near St. Therese Church found horseshoes buried in the soil.

The camp had its own newspaper, "The Merritt Dispatch," published each Thursday. It had a finance office; arrangements for the exchange of dollars to for-

eign money; post exchanges, which carried stocks of tobacco, knick-knacks, and soft drinks; seven tailor shops; a barber shop with twenty-four chairs; an officers' exchange; the quartermaster corps, the camp's supply unit; a library and seven branches, which offered reading material from magazines to vocational books; Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish chaplains, each branch with its own building; a Christian Science Reading Room, the building of which still stands at the southwest corner of Madison Avenue and Eighth Street; several YMCA buildings and Knights of Columbus buildings; a theater; and twenty-eight vocational

classes that included movie operating, accounting, commercial law, penmanship, stenography, algebra and trigonometry, public speaking, and a choice of three foreign languages, French, Spanish, or Italian. The camp's hostess house, where soldiers greeted their families and friends, still stands, a large white house, now subdivided into apartments, on Highland Street and extending through to Concord Street, near Madison Avenue.

Nearly every American division that fought in the First World War sent troops through the camp. Among them was a young officer who was later to become President of the United

General Wesley Merritt

When army camps were built during World War I, it was the practice to name them after Civil War generals. Camp Merritt was no exception. Wesley Merritt was an honoree who was worthy of the choice of his name for the camp that sprawled over Cresskill and Dumont.

Merritt's career spanned over forty-five years as he led troops in the Civil War, the Indian Wars, and the Spanish-American War.

Early in his career, Merritt's paths crossed those of General George Custer. It would be hard to imagine two more dissimilar leaders. Custer was wild, boisterous, and a practical joker who refused to follow orders. His career was therefore erratic and tragic, finally ending in his death at the Battle of the Little Big Horn--history's Custer's Last Stand. Merritt, on the other hand, was capable, caring, and competent. Yet every schoolchild knows Custer's name; few know Merritt's.

Merritt was graduated from West Point in 1860 and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the cavalry. He served during the War Between the States in the Army of the Potomac, commanding the cavalry under General Cooke.

After promotion to captain, Merritt served in Washington, D.C., and in the Battle of Gettysburg, where he was decorated for gallant and meritorious services and promoted to major.

He was decorated again and promoted to lieutenant

colonel after the Battle of Yellow Tavern in Virginia; thereafter he moved quickly through the ranks. He attained promotion to major general during the campaign ending with the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia.

For five years, 1882 to 1887, Merritt served as superintendent of the United States Military Academy--West Point.

Following those years, Merritt held several government posts, but by 1898, Merritt's military responsibilities increased during the war with Spain. Merritt was once again in combat, commanding the first Philippine Expedition. With Merritt commanding the American land forces and Admiral George Dewey commanding the sea forces, Manila was captured and President William McKinley proclaimed Merritt the governor general of the islands.

He completed his career in command of the Department of the East at Governor's Island, New York, a post he had held earlier. He retired in 1900 and died ten years later, at the age of 74.

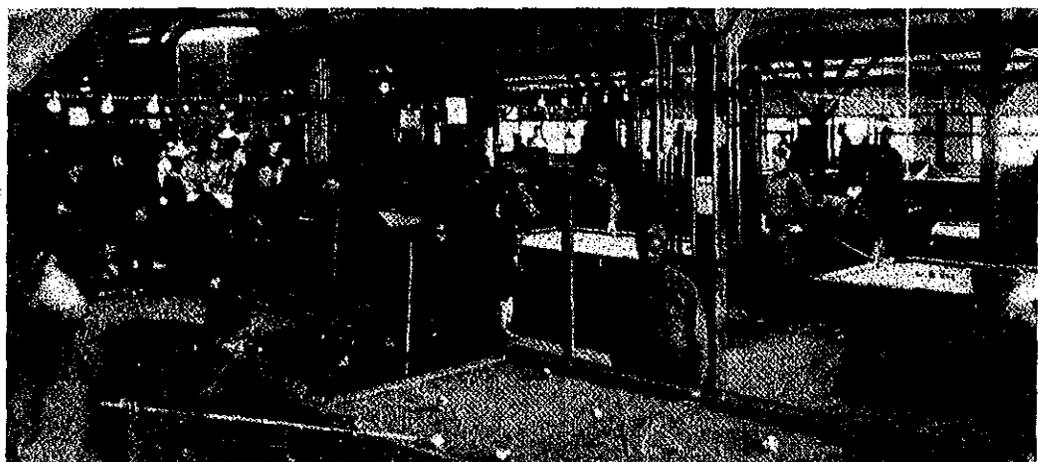
He never knew of the camp in Cresskill-Dumont that bore his name and honored him. Nor did he know that when the graceful granite memorial column was erected on Knickerbocker Road and dedicated by his old West Point student General John J. Pershing, thousands of people cheered and children from thirty communities passed in review, commemorating the World War I embarkation camp and the man who gave it his name.



America's doughboys getting ready to go "over there."



Above and below: Merritt Hall, the enlisted-men's club of Camp Merritt. The hall, used as a social hall, was donated by Mrs. Wesley Merritt. Former President and then-Colonel Theodore Roosevelt spoke at the dedication of the hall on January 30, 1918.





Above: Nurses at Camp Merritt's base hospital. Among their duties was battling a severe outbreak of influenza. The house pictured at left represented one of many buildings used as quarters for the nurses. The house, on Knickerbocker Road just south of the the circle, later became the Cresskill Lodge, a restaurant.



Below left: A Camp Merritt barracks.

Below right: The Christian Science Welfare Building. This was one of many buildings in the area used for hospitality. This house still stands on the corner of Madison Avenue and Eighth Street.



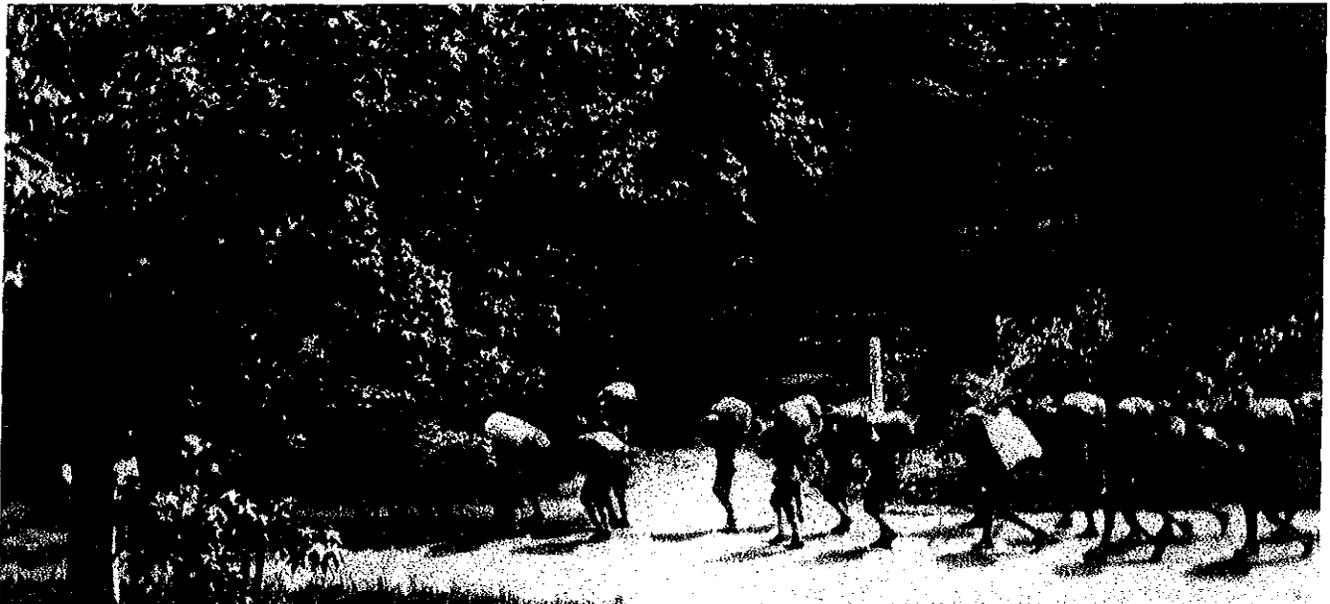


A company of troops standing at attention at Camp Merritt.



Beds being aired in the open at Camp Merritt.

*Troops marching down Grant Avenue
passing Jefferson Avenue on the way to embarkation.*



States, Harry S Truman. The total number of men sent overseas from Camp Merritt between November 1917 and November 1918 was 578,566, of which 16,052 were officers and 562,502 were enlisted men.

In addition, Camp Merritt served as the clearinghouse of the American Expeditionary Force (A.E.F., the army mobilized for overseas duty during World War I). Officials in the camp weeded out undesirables, segregated alien enemies, and processed conscientious objectors.

A steady stream of men marched in full-dress uniform through Cresskill, east down Madison Avenue and up Hillside Avenue to the Palisades. From there they went down to Alpine Landing, one of the river landings used during the Revolutionary War against the British and now the point at which America's men set out to fight beside their British brethren. At Alpine Landing the men boarded ferries that headed south to Hoboken and the oceangoing troop ships.

The town revolved around the existence of Camp Merritt. Khaki was the color most prominently seen on the streets of the borough, and the two hotels were packed with visitors to the doughboys. Many times the hotels were filled. Then, according to the 1983 reminiscences of Estelle Tallman, descendent of an old Dutch family, "a lot of people opened up their homes to take care of the parents when they came to visit the

boys before they went overseas."

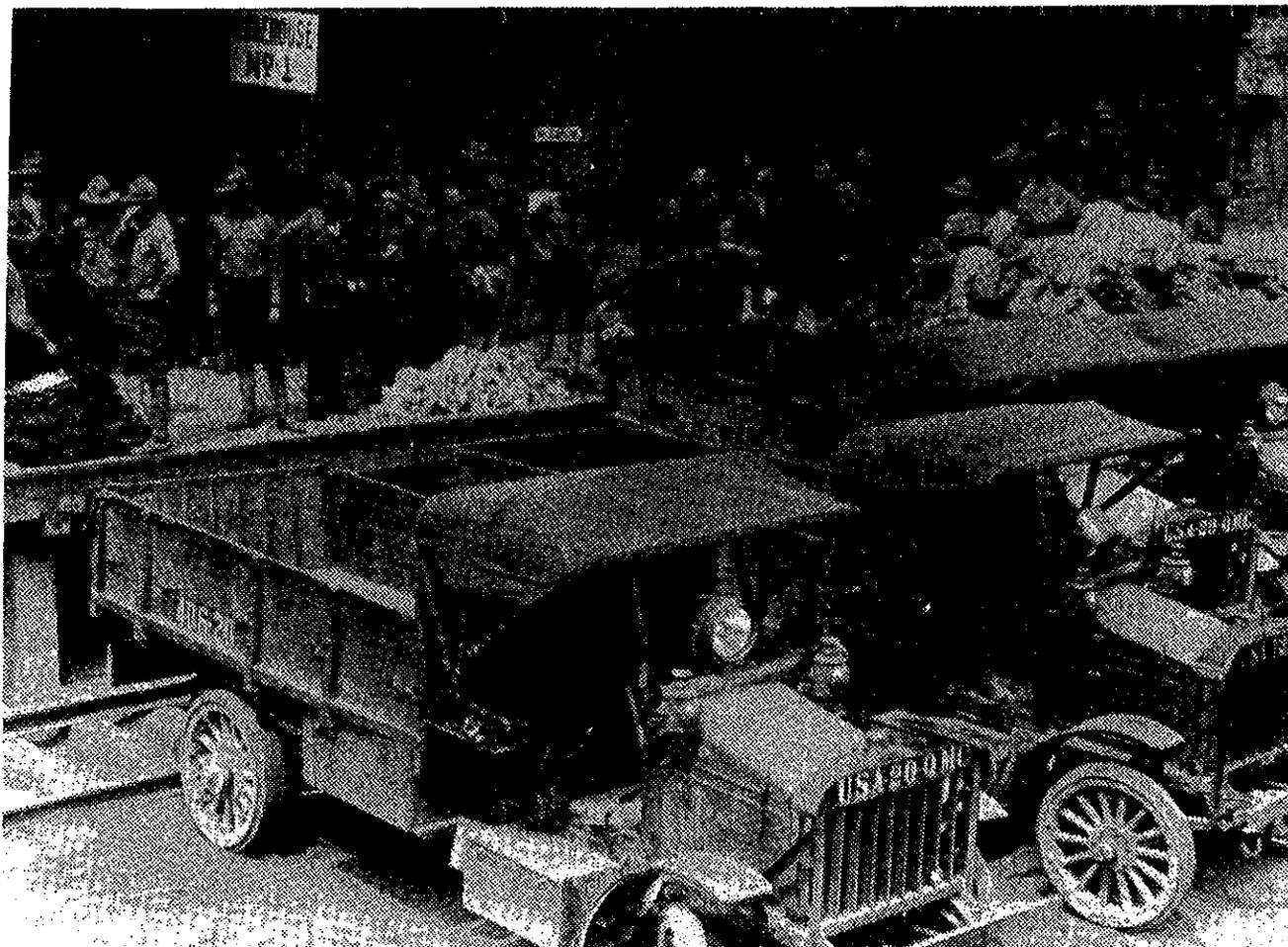
Dorothy Czirr, who was born in 1904 and who was a child living in her Jefferson Avenue home during the First World War, recalled bringing soldiers home for Sunday dinner and putting up their visiting families, especially their women relatives, when the hotels were full, sometimes even having to house people on the porch. Her son David, who lives with his brother in the rambling Victorian house on Jefferson Avenue, recalls his mother and grandmother talking about two women who rented out their grandmother's upstairs bedroom during the Camp Merritt days. The women took weekly trips to New York City, allegedly to visit a Swedish masseuse. One day, when the women were on their New York trip, David recalls being told, government officials came to the house to ask permission to install listening devices in the women's bedroom. The two women never returned. David surmises, as did his mother and grandmother, that the women were reporting on troop movements.

David remembers his grandmother telling him also that she baked apple pies and placed them at the corner of Jefferson and Madison avenues, where hungry--and probably homesick--young soldiers picked them up.

Mrs. Czirr, who later became a kindergarten teacher in the Edward H. Bryan School and taught there for a quarter of a century, re-

membered the flu epidemic in the camp, when a quarantine line prevented anyone from crossing past Jefferson Avenue. She heard the sounds of reveille in the morning and taps in the evening coming from the camp. The borough's children did all they could for their heroes--the fighting men of Camp Merritt: They ran errands, supplied the men with soap, razor blades, candy bars, and did anything else they could for the soldiers' comfort. The youngsters mailed letters the soldiers handed to them as the troops marched through Cresskill--with many of the 600 or so residents turning out to see them--and then on to the trains or the Alpine Landing Road. And the town's children were excited and terrified by the numerous and often fierce fires in the barracks. The children were rewarded with something more tangible than the soldiers' appreciation. After the war medals were distributed through the schools to the town's children--and apparently to the children of most of the surrounding towns, with the inscription, "Boys of Camp Merritt are grateful to you," and the date, 1919.

John Schweikart, who was born in Cresskill and who served for many years as a Cresskill school custodian, recalled, also from boyhood, the sound of the soldiers--the sound of their marching as he sat as a student in the Orchard Street School and heard the thousands of young men march



Troops awaiting orders to load army trucks with war materiel.

down Madison Avenue and off to war.

It is not known how many a teenaged girl in Cresskill fell in love with a young soldier when he was stationed in her little town, only to have him march away from her forever.

Cresskill's borough historian, John Spring, who knew Cresskill well as a boy, recalls singing groups performing the songs of Camp Merritt long after the war was over. Spring's father came to work as a minister in Camp Merritt in 1917 during his vacation. He was placed in charge of YMCA Hut No. 3 for the duration, after which he became minister of the Old

North Church in Dumont. He stored many helmets, foot lockers, rifles, desks, and general paraphernalia in the parsonage barn for years after the war.

In 1924 the Merritt Memorial, 65 feet high, was dedicated at the circle on Knickerbocker Road between Dumont and Cresskill. General John J. Pershing spoke to the wildly cheering crowds. It was a proud moment for "Black Jack" Pershing as he honored the memory of the camp that had been named for the man, Major General Wesley Merritt, who in 1886 had presented second lieutenant bars to a cadet named John J. Pershing.

Following the end of Camp Merritt's reason for existence, the buildings were razed and the lumber was cut into lengths by the Harris Brothers Construction Company, located in what later became known as the Burns tract, at the top of Grant Avenue. The lumber was then used for houses and garages in the area. Years later people who subsequently owned homes on the acreage that had been Camp Merritt still unearthed bandages, shells, and other mementos of the huge camp.

Little did the people of Cresskill, or of the world, know that this had not been the war to end all wars.

9

A Decade of Peace

The war ended. With it ended the Camp Merritt days. The excitement of thousands of soldiers in Cresskill's midst abated to a quieter, more introspective time, but a time of peace.

Though the rural years were fading, Cresskill retained its small-town charm. Its officials and residents were anxious to create a borough that would serve the needs of the increased population.

As the population grew in the early 1920s--from some five hundred prewar to nearly a thousand after the war--the town responded with increased services. The police department was formed in 1925 when the constables and marshalls who covered a wide area of the county were no longer able to meet the needs of Cresskill, which, like twenty-six other towns in Bergen County, was by then thirty years into its adventure of going it alone as a borough. The two-story Borough Hall, then on Grant Avenue, had

jail cells on the ground floor.

One of the borough marshalls was Leon Traubel, who came to Cresskill as a boy. At a council meeting, he recalled, he mentioned that he rode a motorcycle. That was reason enough to appoint him as marshall, at fifty cents an hour--not bad pay in those days--but with the stipulation that he pay for his own gas. He went after "the young ones raising a little bit of cain" when townspeople complained, and he "held down the speeders and the rough-necks."

The Volunteer Fire Department, also with thirty years' experience, was growing, but with only a jumper as apparatus at its disposal it needed on one occasion the assistance of the New York Fire Department, which crossed the Hudson by ferry from New York when a particularly raging fire burnt out of control in the Camp Merritt barracks as they were razed.

As more people moved to

Cresskill, it gave many the opportunity to worship in their own town. St. Therese Church, built in 1924, joined the Congregational Church, the first church in Cresskill. By 1931, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Our Saviour was welcoming worshippers too.

In 1928 the Merritt Memorial School was built, which, with the Orchard Street School, enabled the borough's 286 school-age children to attend grades one to eight. Their parents cared enough about their schooling to form the Cresskill PTA. Those youngsters continuing on to high school walked, biked, or took public buses to Tenafly High School. By the twenties, more of the eighth-grade graduates attended high school than had in the first decade of the century, when only six Cresskill students attended high school.

As children have always done and will always do, the borough's little ones took pleasure and gave pleasure. On snowy winter days they trudged to Red

Hill, the name given to Madison Avenue because of the red shale beneath the dirt topping on the road, to glide their sleds down the steep incline. On hot summer days they first had to do their chores of delivering milk or groceries, stacking wood, gardening, clerking in the grocery store, or picking berries for the supper pie. Then they swam in waterlily-covered Huyler's pond near where present-day Engle Street is--and a cold swim it must have been because the pond was fed by springs. Others swam in a pond west of Hillside Avenue on the Rionda estate, Rio Vista, which extended from the top of the Palisades to County Road. One of Leon Traubel's boyhood memories is of Manuel Rionda, a Cuban sugar baron, checking his property on horseback, watching children from towns all around frolicking in the water and in and out of the bathhouses, which they used free by prearrangement between Rionda and local towns. Rionda developed Hillside Avenue and planted the maple trees along it that give such pleasure each fall when they blaze into color. The hardiest of the youngsters walked to the Yonkers Ferry, which docked at the Alpine boat basin, and swam in the Hudson.

The children could hunt for--and find--arrowheads fashioned of stone and with ends sharp as needles in the present-day Tammy Brook area. The boys trapped muskrat and hunt-

ed for pheasant, rabbits, and partridge, but most of the time deer remained high in the Palisades. Other boys caught fish, including trout, and mussels and eel in the streams. Boys and girls played games: ring-o-levio, cat, hide and seek, red rover, dock-in-a-rock (a type of tag), jump rope, kick the can, hopscotch, and stilt-walking. In the evenings, after homework was done, they listened to the radio.

The youngsters' homes were on Madison Avenue, Jefferson Avenue, County Road, Orchard Street, Railroad Avenue, or Westervelt Avenue and on some of the newer roads: Cresskill Avenue, Mezzine Drive, Bergen Terrace, and Smith Terrace. Some of the borough's finest Victorian-style houses were--and are--located on some of these streets. To dig the cellars for many of the early-twentieth-century homes, a horse pulled a scoop across the site of the cellar. Over and over the horse pulled the scoop across the ever-deepening hole until the builders finished it off by squaring the sides with hand shovels.

There were several shops on Union Avenue, which had a base called a "telford base" fashioned of smoothed-over rocks covered by dirt. If the bumpy street was too difficult to maneuver, first for ladies' long skirts and later, in the twenties, for ladies' high heels, flagstones were used to create a sidewalk on the south side of the street.

There were several grocery stores--including Baine's Grocery and Peter's Deli, and an A&P. But the grocery stores were not like anything found today: Clerks were on hand to bring items to customers, who stood at the counter. There were no shopping carts; no grocery/dairy/meat/baked goods aisles; and no check-out counters. Laverne French, a former elementary school teacher and now a substitute teacher, has lived in Cresskill since she was a child, in the twenties. She recalls, "There was a grocery store, a funny store. You served yourself the butter you wanted with a knife that was kept on the butter in a wooden tub."

Richard Barretta, who was born and raised in the house at the northwest end of Union Avenue, recalls the honor system at Ackerman's Dairy on County Road. "You got eggs or a quart of milk from the fridge, where you could go twenty-four hours of the day, and you wrote your name on a pad. No one checked, and no one stole," he says.

Among the shops on Union Avenue were a butcher shop, owned by the father of Leon Traubel, whose memories recorded in 1988 contributed to this book many of the details of the early decades of the century; a delicatessen; a barber where a haircut set gentlemen back twenty-five cents, and while they waited there was someone there to play the mandolin. There

was a beauty shop too, Julia's. There was a shoemaker, John Moisco, in the stone house at the corner of Third Street and Madison Avenue. Laverne French recalls, "he was a real craftsman."

Someone had to pick up the garbage generated by the individuals and the businesses of Cresskill. Louis Scioscio, who lived on Seventh Street, began collecting the townspeople's trash with a horse and buggy in 1929. Within a short time he had a route that included Tenafly, Dumont, Bergenfield, Waldwick, Haworth, and Harrison, in addition to his own town. So important was his task that he was exempted from service during World War II, and he eventually was instrumental in setting up the scavenger services of both Joseph DiRese and Vincent Ippolito.

The post office was near the northwest end of Union Avenue. Townsfolk gathered there each evening to collect their mail from post boxes. Home mail delivery would not begin until the forties--and then it was delivered twice a day. And there was a candy store on Union Avenue owned by Ben Casser, who would become a mayor of Cresskill.

Casser, who attended school only to the eighth grade, eventually became a wealthy entrepreneur and property owner. He began his days in Cresskill in the second decade of the century as the proprietor of a newspaper and candy store, from which he peddled his

papers at Camp Merritt each day. Then, with his brother, Jules, he founded a business that was needed in the area--the first public transit bus line, in 1920, with two buses that ran between Closter and Englewood. The service was later expanded to Nyack. Eight years later the brothers sold their company, by then a fleet of buses, to Public Service, and by 1930 purchased another bus line, the Manhattan Transit Tours, which ran between Paterson and Passaic and New York City. Ben Casser and his wife Rose reared two sons in Cresskill. Joe Casser, the older son, recalls that his family lived on Union Avenue above Mrs. Peterson's candy store, where Kerge Real Estate is located today, in one of only a handful of homes. Later, his father built a house farther east on Union Avenue, near the Congregational Church, and his Uncle Jules and his grandmother and several great-aunts and other relatives lived in houses nearby. After World War II Ben Casser's family moved into the handsome white house at 300 County Road. Unlike their neighbors, who had given up their farm animals by the 1940s, the Cassers kept horses on their large plot of land until well past the middle of the twentieth century. At times the horses felt the grass was greener on the other side of the fence. Gerry Kirchhoff Vukasin, who was a little girl when her family moved to Cresskill,

to 83 Hillside Avenue, recalls waking up one morning to find two white horses eating the grass in her family's yard. "We sure had fun with them before Mr. Casser's stable man came to claim them," she says.

Farms in the 1920s were common in the area, and most families raised their own produce for canning and preserving. Many families owned a cow. John Schweikart recalled disputes between his neighbors because of a cow that liked the other neighbor's yard more than it did its own and visited there frequently--too frequently.

Older boys were expected to work. Enrico Campoli, who was born in the house that is now Bondy's Tavern at the corner of Piermont Road and Union Avenue, recalled that during his boyhood he went to work at a dairy at 5 A.M. He put the milk into the carriers and delivered it to the customers. At 8 A.M., when he heard the train whistle, he returned the horse and wagon to the barn to get to school on time. While he was in the seventh grade he worked in the Eagle Grocery Store, for which he was paid \$1 for a day and a half of work. This money, he says, "I brought home to my mama, and she gave me a quarter so I could walk to Tenafly to the Bergen [movie] Theater.

Children played and did chores, but they also got sick. When there was a case of a childhood disease in a house, a sign was placed on the front door to

indicate that the house and family were under quarantine and no one should enter. The signs were different colors for different diseases, such as white for measles, blue for mumps. The worst of the childhood diseases was scarlet fever, which required especially stringent quarantine or hospitalization at the Isolation Hospital in Paramus, now Bergen Pines.

The railroad station was a busy depot, with trains numbering close to a dozen a day passing through and handling passengers and freight. Commuting became more common as travel became easier, both by train and, in a more limited way, by bus. A favorite sport of the town's youngsters was to "help" the trainmen turn the train's engine and coal car, which ended its run just north of Union Avenue and then had to be turned on a turntable to resume its trip south.

As for those commuters who didn't take the train or bus to Jersey City, some drove to the Yonkers Ferry, which docked at Alpine, to cross the Hudson. For this scenic trip, complete with music, they paid five cents.

North of the train station was a shed in which ice was stored. In the winter some ice could be cut from a pond in Demarest but most ice, and especially in the summer, was brought in by train, probably from Rockland Lake, and then packed in sawdust in the shed. It didn't melt, even in the summer, Leon Traubel recalled, but it did stick to-

gether in warm weather. Traubel's father, the butcher, and other storekeepers used this ice to preserve their goods.

Among the businesses operating in Cresskill in the 1920s were the Palliser Mill Works, the Westervelt Coal Company, and a gold-beating shop that hammered gold leaf for hat bands. The George Taufer Cement Factory operated in a sand pit behind Cresskill Avenue, in the general vicinity of where the high school stands today. At the point where Cresskill Avenue ended, the road narrowed so that only a horse and wagon could get through. From this factory

came hand-worked cement blocks that fashioned many of the foundations and the homes of Cresskill and the surrounding area, including a house on the north side of Meadow Street and the house at the bend of Grant Avenue now owned by attorney and former councilman Steven Schuster.

For some time after the war, Harris Brothers continued to tear down Camp Merritt barracks that hadn't been destroyed by fire. They sold the wood for lumber, or they built houses and garages from it. Today, the house at 26 Milton Street, now rebuilt above its stone foundation, is one

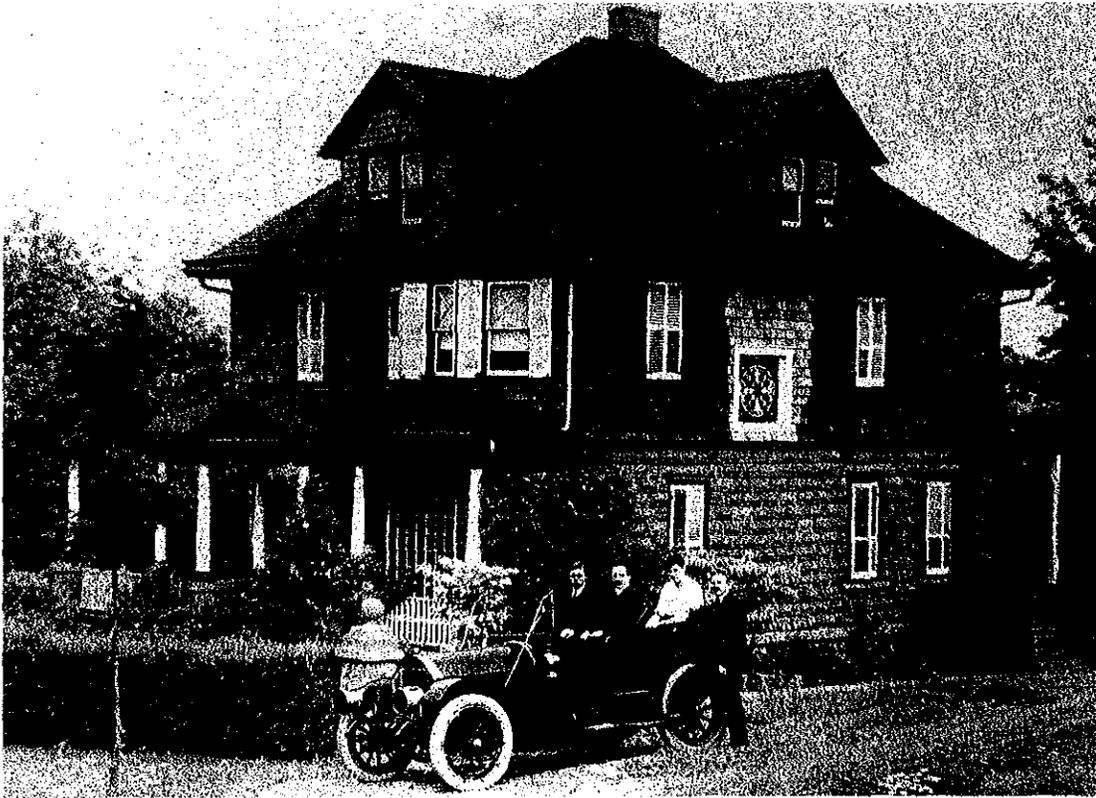
The Board of Health

It was the Board of Health that had to impose quarantines. Not only childhood diseases such as measles and scarlet fever concerned the board. In its sanitary code of 1939 it cited also illnesses such as anthrax, cholera, dengue, and diphtheria. Furthermore, should a person have died of smallpox, diphtheria, or another devastating and extremely contagious illness, that person's funeral was required to be private, within twenty-four hours of death, and with no church or public funeral permitted.

A resident might love the town and want to remain in Cresskill forever—even in death. It's not possible. Board of Health rules state: "No body or part of a body of any person shall be buried in the Borough of Cresskill."

The board issues licenses for births and marriages and certificates for deaths. There are some timing requirements: within five days after birth and seventy-two hours prior to the wedding ceremony; but no time limit on a death certificate, unless that death resulted from a contagious disease, in which case the certificate must be issued within twenty-four hours.

The Board of Health, formed two months after Cresskill's incorporation, was ahead of its time on environmental questions. It addressed such topics as pollution of streams, wells, and springs; the cleanup of material, on a lot or street or within any building, of matter that might be hazardous to health; the proper construction of drains and sewers; and regulations of foul liquids and gases. It prohibited tenements in town, as well as offensive odors from goats or swine—in 1894; these are presumably no longer a concern. As farmland has disappeared, however, the board has in more recent decades added regulations and licensing for dogs and cats.



The lower story of this house at Madison Avenue and Eighth Street, still standing, was constructed of cement blocks manufactured in Cresskill. This type of construction was typical of the period. This picture was taken around 1920.



Left: A bus owned by Benjamin Casser's company. This was one of the buses that linked the towns of the Northern Valley and whose route extended as far as Nyack.

Below: One of the early sites of the Cresskill post office. This is now a fish store on Union Avenue.





*The American Legion Post 21 baseball team from the 1920s.
The legendary Willie Smith is front and center.*



This is a typical example of the outhouses that were behind many of Cresskill's homes. The problem with this type of structure is that it was too far from the house in the winter and too close in the summer.

Executor's AUCTION SALE

Estate of E. B. Westervelt, Dec'd

By Order of B. E. Westervelt, Executor

248

Choice Residential Lots
at Cresskill, N. J.

SATURDAY, JULY 9

— 1921 —

At 1 p.m., on the Premises, Rain or
Shine, in a Mammoth Tent

W. M. SEUFERT, Esq., Attorney
44 Dean St., Englewood, N. J.

BRYAN L. KENNELLY, Inc. Real Estate Auctioneer 149 Broadway, New York
WM. B. YOUNG, Agent of the Property, Englewood, N. J. Tel. Englewood 1009
(Singer Building) Telephone, Cortlandt 1547



UNION AVE., Looking Toward Erie Station. SHOWING PROPERTY TO BE SOLD ON LEFT

of the few houses left from the period of recycling Camp Merritt barracks. It seemed as if Harris Brothers, at one time or another, brought in from elsewhere and employed almost every man who lived in Cresskill and that they sold everything anyone could need for building--from pipes and lumber and prefabricated garages to outhouses, a two-seater going for \$42.50. Future mayor Raymond McGrath came to Cresskill from the Bronx through the company. John Sestanovich, later a teacher and school principal of both elementary schools in Cresskill, first got to know the town when, as a small boy, he accompanied his fa-

ther and uncle to buy radiators from Harris Brothers for a house the uncle owned in West New York. George Mais, who later used his strong frame and affable manner to start a moving company in town, drove trucks for Harris Brothers, delivering the lumber from Camp Merritt to people building homes and sectional garages from it. Laverne French's father came to work at Harris Brothers, transferred here from their company in Louisiana. Her family lived on Fifth Street in a barrack left from Camp Merritt.

Like George Mais and Laverne French's father, African Americans came to Cresskill, many by way of

Englewood, to work in the cement factory and with Harris Brothers Construction Company. Italians, who had first come to the northern Bergen County area during the nineteenth century to work on the railroad, also came in large numbers as stone workers. They settled first in Fort Lee to quarry the Palisades--which provided, among other things, nearly all the cobblestones used on New York City streets--and then moved north to work in construction and other trades. Irish people began to settle in Cresskill, particularly to work as domestics for people on the East Hill. As the nearest Catholic church was in

Laverne French

Laverne French has been a teacher for many years--in elementary school systems from Baltimore to Paterson. She has lived in Cresskill nearly all her life and is proud of her own schooling and that of her children.

Education began in the Orchard Street School, from which she remembers her graduation: "It was so beautiful. All the girls wore white dresses and [carried] big bouquet flowers, the boys in suits."

After graduating from Tenafly High School, to which she walked, she went on to Jersey City State Teacher's College and her first teaching job in Baltimore. This venue turned out to be a fortunate one. Because black people were not permitted to attend the University of Maryland, Mrs. French took an exam at a college named Morgan State. Passing this, as a resident of Maryland she qualified to attend any college in the United States that would have her--at cost only to the State of Maryland, not to her. She elected Teacher's College at Columbia University, where she earned her masters degree. And so began her many years of teaching.

She returned to Cresskill to rear her children. Her daughter Pamela Sommers has a doctorate and teaches at Suny at Binghamton, New York. Donald French was graduated from Bergen County Technical and Vocational High School and is now a carpenter. His proficiency in his field gives rise to Mrs. French's belief that there should be more opportunities for vocational training for students who are not headed for

college. Her second daughter Kathy Cunningham was the first recipient of the Arch Shaw Scholarship in Cresskill High School, in 1974. She is a nutritional coordinator in Boston. Robin French Steward lives in Maplewood and is an attorney.

What was Laverne's life like as a black child in Cresskill? There were pools where she wasn't allowed to swim, and there was a class trip to Washington, D.C., where she wasn't allowed to stay in the hotel with the other children. Her mother, who was active with the Cresskill PTA, saw to it that the school found a family with whom Laverne stayed during the trip, and "I could have meals at the hotel." But the other children, she says, had to stay in their hotel rooms in the evening, while the family she stayed with took her to the movies. "Everything works out," she says.

As a religious woman, she wasn't, and isn't, angry. Racism--"I never thought about it. God put us here. People need to deal with their own behavior. They must be responsible. What is this talk about minorities? Each of us is unique," she says, "with unique abilities. People have to start using their own talents. A child can go to the library and many other places free. Nothing can stop them [from using their talents]. We have to teach people to start assuming their rights and do something productive."

She'll continue to influence children, both her own and those she teaches, and it's likely the children will be the better for it.

Englewood, a long trip from Cresskill in those days, their employers, not wanting their help to take prolonged absences to attend church services, were instrumental in getting St. Therese Church underway.

Off Jefferson Avenue around where Poplar Street is today was a conclave called Finn Town. This Finnish community, numbering about thirty-five people and complete with a neighborhood sauna that six people at a time--men and women separately--could attend, had moved to Cresskill early in the century. They settled in homes on a few streets and felt comfortable in the town, both among themselves and with their neighbors, says Edith Warjo Kaske, who grew up there.

But not everyone welcomed people unlike themselves to Cresskill. In the late 1920s and early 1930s in New Jersey there were incidents of cross burnings, aimed at Catholics, Jews, and blacks. Cresskill apparently was not spared; the occurrences were scattered and few and seemed to have been targeted primarily at Catholics and possibly at people who were opposed to Prohibition.

Laverne French, who said she accepted the fact that there were places she, as a black child, could not go too because of the laws of segregation in the land, recalls, however, a happy childhood and a great love of Cresskill, as a child and ever since. She remembers the land where the high

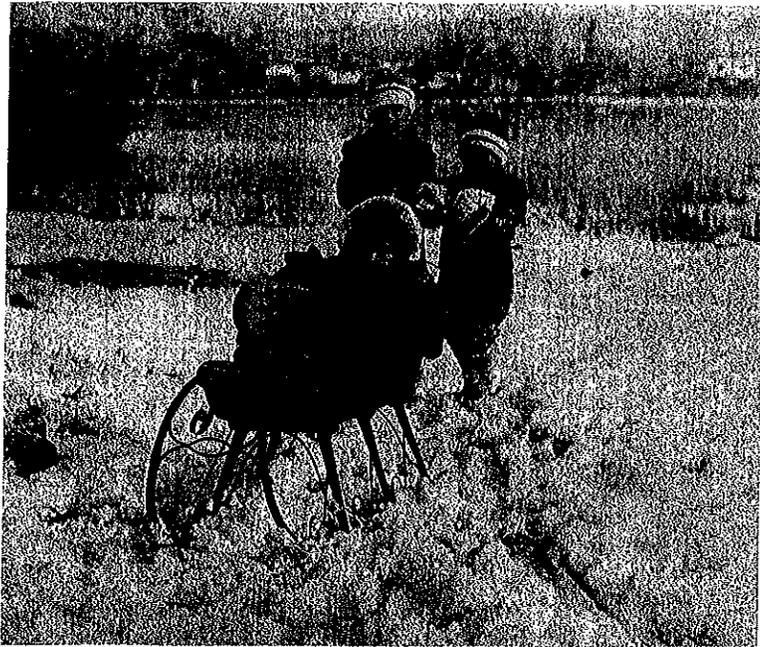
school is. "It was a dirt road to Demarest, along the creek, through the woods, lots of land, with sandy banks. We loved to go there and pick blackberries. And," she adds, "we pulled out ragweed plants whenever we found it because we knew it made people with allergies sick." She remembers the black people who lived on Allen Street and Third Street and Fifth Street and Sixth Street, some of whom live there still: the Hattens, the Cashes, the Millers, the Siscos, and her own family, the Harpers. Mrs. French lived on Fifth Street ("And we had a garden that went all the way back to Sixth Street."). One of her childhood treats was making home-made root beer. "Sugar was expensive, and it took a lot of sugar," she says. The Maises and the Smiths lived on Third Street. Laverne French says, "he [Willie Smith] played a washboard, hillbilly music, a one-man band." And, she recalls, Willie Smith was a "wonderful player" on Cresskill's own ball team. "Everyone came out to see him."

Willie's brother, John, who now lives in Englewood, said his father was the first black person in Cresskill. William Smith came from Washington, D.C., around 1901, John said, to work in the Cresskill Lumber Yard near Railroad Avenue, the present-day Piermont Road. In 1909 he married John's mother, who had come from Bermuda and did domestic

work in New York City. Edward was born soon afterward and stayed in Cresskill, on Allen Street, for many years, fixing televisions for area folks. Willie, John, and Leonard followed.

The Pattersons lived above the garage that belonged to the Westervelt Coal Company, where Cresskill's library is now located. Next door lived Abundio and Virginia Trumbetti, whose grandson, James, is now a police officer with the Cresskill force. James (Buddy) Patterson, who now lives in Englewood, recalls that one of the tragedies that sometimes befell Cresskill's children was that his little brother Moses was killed by a Public Service bus on Union Avenue in the early thirties, when he was seven years old. "He was a brilliant kid," Patterson adds. His sister Agnes recalls that Moses did errands for the neighbors, for which he got paid. "But he didn't go out and buy candy, like other kids would. He bought food for Momma."

Agnes Patterson, who also lives in Englewood, went to school with Reginald Cash and later married him. Reggie Cash was born in Cresskill and lived in the town until he died a few years ago. His parents, Marcellus and his wife, Carrie, were the first black family in Cresskill, coming here around 1912 when they moved from Newark to work in Peter Westervelt's coal company. They lived above Westervelt's garage



The Cash children in their old-fashioned sleigh, east of Third Street. This photograph was taken in the 1940s.

A view of Union Avenue looking northwest from the corner of Willow Street. According to Catherine Gleason, Cresskill's postmaster for twenty years, the small building at photo right was once used as the town post office and was later a real estate office. The building was owned by Benjamin Casser. Next to it is the old firehouse.



where the Pattersons later lived. When Reggie and Agnes also moved to the Union Avenue home, Marcellus and Carrie--or possibly Westervelt, it's not clear--built a house at 33 Allen Street and moved in there. At the time of Cresskill's celebrating the country's bicentennial in 1976, Carrie Cash was the oldest living mother in Cresskill, in her late nineties, and was feted as such.

There was, however, little representation of the di-

verse nationalities and religions that would make up the town by the end of the twentieth century. There were few, if any, Asians. There were, according to Joe Casser, three Jewish families in Cresskill during the 1920s--his own large extended family, the family of Leon Traubel, and that of a dentist who lived across the street from the Cassers on Union Avenue.

By the 1930s there was another candy store in town. Sam Canter (a Casser cou-

sin) owned Sammy's, across the railroad track on Madison Avenue. Edith Kaske remembers Sammy's candy/newspaper/ice cream store and especially the pinball machine he kept there for the amusement of the boys--the girls didn't play pinball. Laverne French also recalls Sammy and his wife, Florrie. "He was the most patient man. He had the time of day for everyone, kids and adults."

Edith Kaske recalls spending time one day

counting the number of taverns in town. She and her girl friend were surprised, she says, that they counted ten taverns--in a community of about 2,000 people. There had been no taverns in town during Prohibition in the 1920s, and though no one can recall any speakeasies in town, former police officer Michael Engel says he's been told that his house at 87 Monroe Avenue was the site of a speakeasy.

The Palisade Development Company, which had already begun building in Cresskill, planned for further expansion when the great bridge across the Hudson would be completed in 1931. With explosive population increases expected in Bergen County, the company prepared for the influx of new residents by laying out Margie, Park, and Morningside avenues. The number of cars on the bor-

ough's streets increased noticeably. Curbs were installed, an improvement that many nearby towns have not added even in the 1990s. Homes, cars, businesses, the new school--Merritt Memorial--and more services were added in the late 1920s, making Cresskill a vibrant and growing town. But it all came to a halt as the new decade began.

To Eat and Drink in Cresskill

Edith Kaske may have counted ten taverns in Cresskill in the thirties, but a visitor coming in today might still be surprised by the number of restaurants and bars there have been in a town the size of Cresskill.

The large building that is Gatsby's on Piermont Road started out as Jimmy's Holiday Haven, which served family meals such as sandwiches and ice cream. It then became the Showcase, then the Orbit Inn, which moved to Cresskill from Tenafly after the building it was in was destroyed by fire. It later caused trouble for its Cresskill neighbors when its patrons spilled out late each night, rowdy and boisterous. After the Orbit Inn, it was called the Serendipity Club.

Directly down the street on Piermont Road was the 64 Club, which operated in the fifties and probably sold its liquor license to the Showcase when it opened.

La Petite Auberge on East Madison Avenue, Cresskill's upscale, four-star restaurant, was a youth center in the thirties, Art's Marine Bar in the forties, and Haggie's in the fifties.

Hungry Peddler, on Knickerbocker Road, is popular with young people meeting at the spacious bar and with older folks meeting for dinner in the dining rooms. After starting out as Burns Inn and the Merritt Club, it became Tattered Tom's, whose tattered reputation was caused by its noisy patrons and the regular calls from townfolk to the police.

The Split Rail, which had been a family restaurant on Piermont Road just north of Union Avenue, gave way to Jolly Nick's, which, despite its unimpressive appearance, turned out one good hot dog after another.

The site of Sam's, on Union Avenue where the town's first firehouse had been, started out as a restaurant called the Town Cafe. And the way that restaurant got its liquor license, no easy acquisition, was to buy Tammy Brook Country Club's when the club was closed and its license became available.

Terrana's Ristorante, on the other hand, doesn't have a liquor license. There were none to buy when it opened in the eighties, but it has no trouble attracting customers to its Italian food, in the Clock Tower Square on Piermont Road.

Also in a shopping area just five years in existence--Rio Vista Plaza--is Distinctive Caterers. Though their primary function is catering, they have, in addition, opened a small cafe in their shop facing Piermont Road.

There had been another restaurant, in the early sixties, with a liquor license--the Eagle Rest Restaurant, where Curiosity Jewelers is today on Union Avenue. Earlier, in the forties and fifties, Charlie Zopp's Diner was located down an alleyway off Union Avenue, but a fire brought this enterprise to an end.

Also gone, after operating in Cresskill for more than ten years in mid-century is the Cresskill Lodge, which was run by the Degli-Antoni family on Knickerbocker Road, just north of where Quirk Funeral Home is today.

Bondy's Tavern, at the northeast intersection of Union Avenue and Piermont Road, is in a house that dates back to the beginning of the century. In 1930, according to Tony Bondy, it was known as Maury's, or Mores', he isn't sure which. It was then McQueen's Tavern, and then Conklin's Tavern.

Moosehead's, a tavern on Madison Avenue just west of Piermont Road, has been owned since 1990 by Dan Noseworthy, who grew up in Cresskill and went through its schools. This building, too, has had a long history. It was the town post office early in the century, then a butcher shop, and then, in turn, the Black and White Tavern, Murphy's Tavern, Kelly and Byrne's Tavern, and until four year ago, Parkview Tavern.

Policing Cresskill

There was a time when every police officer in Cresskill knew every resident. And vice versa. Of course, in 1925, when the Police Department was formed, there were fewer than 2,000 people in Cresskill. And there were only three police officers, with constables and marshalls to help them out.

No longer. There are now more than 7,000 residents in town, and the police force has kept up with the increasingly more complex residential and business population, to a force of 21, but it's not as likely that townspeople and town cops recognize one another. Still, of those nearly two dozen police officers, nine live in Cresskill and four live in Dumont (and of those, two grew up in Cresskill). The others live in towns from Bergenfield to Mahwah.

When the chief's around, it's a formal police force, with the officers addressing one another by title and last name in the presence of a "civilian." The longtime officers--Chief Frank Tino, Jr., Captain Norbert Langer, Lt. Samuel Valentich, Lt. Arthur McLaughlin, Sgt. Robert Mueller--and the men who grew up in town--Sgt. Ernest Hilling, Det. Sgt. William Macchio, Ptl. Theodore Cebulski, Ptl. Michael O'Loughlin, Ptl. Raymond Coleman, Ptl. Bert Looby, and Ptl. Glenn Petillo--are called Frank, Norb, Sam, Art, Tom, Bob, Ernie, Bill, Ted, Mike, Ray, Bert, and Glenn by their neighbors, but they are no longer just "the guys next door." Their function now is to patrol the town or to cover the police desk with dignity, yet they never fail to wave to old friends as they cruise around town.

Harold Purdy was the town's first police chief, a post he was appointed to four years after he joined the newly created Police Department. In 1928 Purdy became the first, of only five, Cresskill police chiefs. Before that time five marshalls and several constables had enforced the law in the new town, but the young Harold Purdy hung around and helped out wherever he could. When it came time to organize a police department, Purdy and the marshalls and constables became the first police officers, thirteen in all. Cresskill in those days consisted of a few paved roads and a lot of nearly impassable dirt roads. The department's one police car did not have radio communication equipment. When a call for help came in to headquarters, a patrolman often answered the call on foot. If more help was needed, the car brought reinforcements.

After Purdy's retirement in 1952, his successor, Nicholas Short, established precedent: Every police chief--and many of the officers--since that time has been born in Cresskill or has been raised in town.

Nick Short was a familiar figure in town. Even as chief he patrolled the town--in his car, sometimes

for his entire tour of duty. A strong-willed man, he knew how he wanted his police department to be run, and it was run the way he wanted it.

He was born in the hotel owned by his father, Edward--the Prospect Hotel at the northwest corner of Grant Avenue beside the railroad. Edward Short served as Cresskill's mayor from 1922 to 1927, but his son's tenure as a police officer was longer--from 1946 to 1971, with the last twenty of those years as chief. To go into police work, Nick left what appeared to be a promising future in big-league baseball, first semi-pro work in Bergen County and then an offer from the Cincinnati Reds.

With much of Short's years as chief occurring during the troubled sixties, juvenile problems were uppermost on his mind. He created the post of juvenile officer, appointing his captain, Warren Smith, to that position. It was Smith who began the borough's first youth council, to deal directly with young people who appeared headed for trouble.

Smith succeeded Short as chief in the early seventies and inherited the ongoing difficulties with juvenile drug taking and rebellion. He worked closely with the newly formed Juvenile Conference Committee, the successor to the youth council, and with his juvenile officer, Detective Mike Engel, retired now but remembered as a man who cared so much about the kids in town, the good kids and the "bad," that he would spend an entire evening in the park where the kids hung out, talking with them, getting to know them, trying to understand what caused their need to act out their pain and anger.

Smith was born on Jefferson Avenue, the third of nine children, several of whom remained in Cresskill as young adults. He never left Cresskill. He and his wife, Marguerite, raised their seven children on Delmar Avenue. Two sons still live in Cresskill. No prompt was too small to start Smith extolling the virtues of his hometown, and woe be the listener who did not agree. Easygoing and congenial, he created a department and a chief that were accessible to all the townspeople.

Lester DeVries, Cresskill's chief of police from 1981 to 1987, was born on his family's farm at the southwest corner of County Road and Union Avenue, where the NVE Savings and Loan Association building now stands. A gruff and tough man, as chief he administered his police department differently from his predecessors, leading in a structured manner and presenting himself as more law-friendly than people-friendly.

Frank Tino, Jr., Cresskill's police chief since 1987, was born in New York City's Washington Heights. When he was seven years old he moved

During the summer of 1941, Danny Small, a Cresskill resident, was arrested for disturbing the peace. As he broke out of his jail cell, he shot police officer Edwin Killcast. After a shoot-out on Union Avenue he was taken to the Bergen County jail in a straitjacket by county police officers, shown here.



with his family to Cresskill, not imagining, in 1963, that he would become the town's chief of police twenty-four years later. His parents have remained in their Heatherhill Road home. When his father, active with the VFW and St. Therese Church, is asked to comment on affairs in town, he says, "Well, I'll just have to run it by the chief," with the pride of a dad who can refer to his son as "chief." Frank, Jr., had thought of going into federal law enforcement after earning his master's degree, but when a slot on the Cresskill police department opened, he took it. "I'm comfortable in Cresskill," he says. With him as chief, the department has returned to trying to know Cresskill residents as individuals and caring about them.

Tino is proud of his officers and his department. Of his juvenile officer, Bill Macchio, who took over Mike Engel's job when Engel was promoted to lieutenant in 1978, he says, "Billy will push to the max for kids. If therapy or counseling is needed, even if the parents can't afford it, he'll find a way to achieve it through different agencies in the area."

The combination of young people and substance abuse is still the department's biggest problem, Tino says, as it is for most small towns in the area. Still, he says, there are at any one time no more than a dozen Cresskill kids at odds with the law, nor, he adds, have there ever been more. And because the department and the town are as small as they are, the youngsters on the cusp of trouble can be identified immediately and can be worked with through the high school's guidance department and the town's Juvenile Conference Committee. The committee, in turn, deals with the youngsters much as a stern parent

might, perhaps assigning them to do community service such as washing police cars, working in the library, or collecting leaves, rather than requiring them to receive punishment through the court system. At other times, Tino says, even the committee is bypassed and the police work directly with the school and the parents.

Cresskill's police officers have had frightening incidents as well as rewarding ones. Once, a crazed gunman took over Union Avenue. It was Friday night, August 8, 1941, when Danny Small, who roomed with Mrs. Anna Grossman ("Mom" she was called) at 46 Meadow Street, was brought into Cresskill police headquarters because he was acting "strangely." Specifically, he had been "on a 'bat,'"--drinking--for two weeks, according to his friend Thomas Sherman. Sherman, who also roomed at "Mom's," was a driver, like Small, working out of the Public Service bus depot at the southwest corner of Union Avenue. Small was counting the leaves on



Police on parade on East Madison Avenue in the 1960s.

Left to right: Norbert Langer, Roger Snow, Michael Engel, Arthur Pressler, James Ahearn, George Freer, Peter Fritz.

trees and saw snakes chasing him and green cats jumping out at him. He yelled, "Save me, they're chasing me with a Flit [an insecticide] gun." So Dr. Sam Loman, the borough physician, gave Small a shot of morphine in his jail cell and afterwards another, during the night, in his rooming house. The next morning, after going out of his rooming-house window and jumping off the roof, Small was no better and was jailed in the police station. Shortly before 10 o'clock, when Patrolman Edwin Killcast brought Small the drink of water he had asked for, Small rammed open the sliding cell door, and while snatching Killcast's revolver from his holster, shot the officer through the abdomen into the thigh. Small dashed onto Union Avenue, brandishing the gun and threatening everyone around him, especially the wounded Killcast, who also ran out. William Calcagni, who owned a butcher shop where a home furnishings shop is today, told his frightened shoppers, women buying meat "for Sunday," to lock the door. Things happened fast. Small ran down the street shouting obscenities. Jimmy Flotard ran out of his bathroom, above the liquor store, and out into the street trying to help. Mrs. Minnie Bartley, who lived at 31 Milton Street, came out of Calcagni's butcher shop trying to help. Dr. Loman, who was getting a shave in the barber shop, heard the commotion and came out, trying to help. Calcagni ran out the back door of the butcher shop with his 32-mm revolver, which he owned as a police marshal, trying to help. They all helped. Flotard talked to Small. Mrs. Bartley talked to Small, saying "What the devil is the matter with you?" Dr. Loman talked to Small. "Well, Danny, hand over the gun." Small responded by again pointing his gun at Killcast, who was still not down and who jumped behind a car. But the doctor calmed Small, and by the time Calcagni reached him, Small gave over his gun. They took Small away in a straitjacket. Killcast was hospitalized for two weeks and was left with a permanent limp. Small was booked on a charge of intent to kill.

Some twenty years ago, a thirteen-year-old youngster ran into police headquarters shouting that a robbery was taking place at the Garden State Farms market on Union Avenue, that the man had tied and gagged the cashier and was holding her at gunpoint. The first police officer on the scene crept low outside the plate-glass window hoping to catch the thief unaware. To his chagrin (and probably some heartstopping fear) someone--it's believed it was a local merchant--shouted from the street, "The cop has a gun." Things happened fast. The thief threw the woman against the wall and ran out the back door. He was caught driving away from Cresskill a short time later. But the cops still talk about the teacher from Passaic County who needed mon-

ey and tried a holdup in Cresskill to get it.

In the fall of 1992 three police officers were held at gunpoint on the northeast corner of Union Avenue and Piermont Road, in front of Bondy's Tavern. Only when the Demarest police chief, who knew the culprit, intervened did the man turn in his gun and surrender.

The men have backup help when it's needed, in the auxiliary police force, people who direct traffic, help out at major fires, and stand in for school crossing guards. Joe Lally, the captain, and Oliver Pratt have been on the force since the early fifties. Other Cresskill men are Pete DeVries, son of the former chief, Kevin Peter, Bill Richardson, Cliff Cernak, and Kenny Soule, all of whom are young men who grew up in town, and Frank Cinquino, Ed Fischer, Tom Neary, Jerry Bourbalis, and Wade Schwarz, who live in town. To qualify for the auxiliary, they must attend the Police Academy for 40 hours. To qualify for the Police Department, police officers, who currently require a high school diploma, must attend the Police Academy for 600 hours, that is, six months, Monday to Friday, from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tino says Cresskill's police department will henceforth require a bachelor's degree for its incoming officers.

Today's Cresskill Police Department has become a force of educated and capable men. Though it has not had a female police officer as yet, there have been women dispatchers, notably the late Pat Mace, whose voice for eighteen years before her untimely death in 1990 soothed all who called in to police headquarters. Several of Cresskill's cops (and cops is not a derogatory term--it stands, according to the chief, for "constable on patrol"), primarily its top officers after the chief, are nearing retirement age.

It'll be a young force then, the median age in the early thirties. The men know the importance of their responsibility. But it's still a small enough force that the police chief himself turns out for a house-fire call and that the town's senior citizens who wish to be part of the program--twenty or so--call in each morning, knowing that if the police dispatcher doesn't get their call by mid-morning and they can't be reached, a police officer will come to investigate. It's still a small enough force that they'll assist a senior citizen in and out of the house, or even drive the older resident to, for example, a doctor when one of the patrol cars is available. They'll open a car door when its owner is standing outside the locked door looking in frustration at the ignition key dangling inside the vehicle. It's getting more difficult, with a changing population and changing times, but they're trying to remain a small-town police force. The old-fashioned kind--the kind with a heart.