

Greenkill Park: A Kingston Resort with a Fascinating History

By Dr. Peter Roberts

River Road Approach to Greenkill Park, Ulster Co., N. Y.



View of Greenkill Park with the Rondout Creek and Creek Locks Road in the foreground. Circa 1914. Postcard. FHK Archives.

Greenkill Park, a summer resort overlooking the Rondout Creek, first opened in 1910, and following improvements announced its many amenities in 1914 through a 48-page brochure displaying many photos and an extensive list of references. The resort featured 17 cottages and bungalows, an inn and annex which had accommodations for 50 guests, a

casino which could accommodate large groups, a tennis court, a golf course, a swimming pond, and walking paths. Boating, swimming and fishing were available on the Rondout Creek. The 177-acre property was located in the Town of Ulster on Creek Locks Road three miles from the City of Kingston and one mile southwest of Eddyville.



*View of Greenkill Park, looking north with the Rondout Creek on the right.
Circa 1914. From an advertising brochure. FHK Archives.*

An Adirondack style wooden sign reading "Greenkill Park" rested above and between two stone pillars and greeted visitors to the resort. One of the stone pillars still stands at the heavily overgrown entrance which can be viewed just before one reaches the current NYS Rondout Creek Fishing

Access Site.

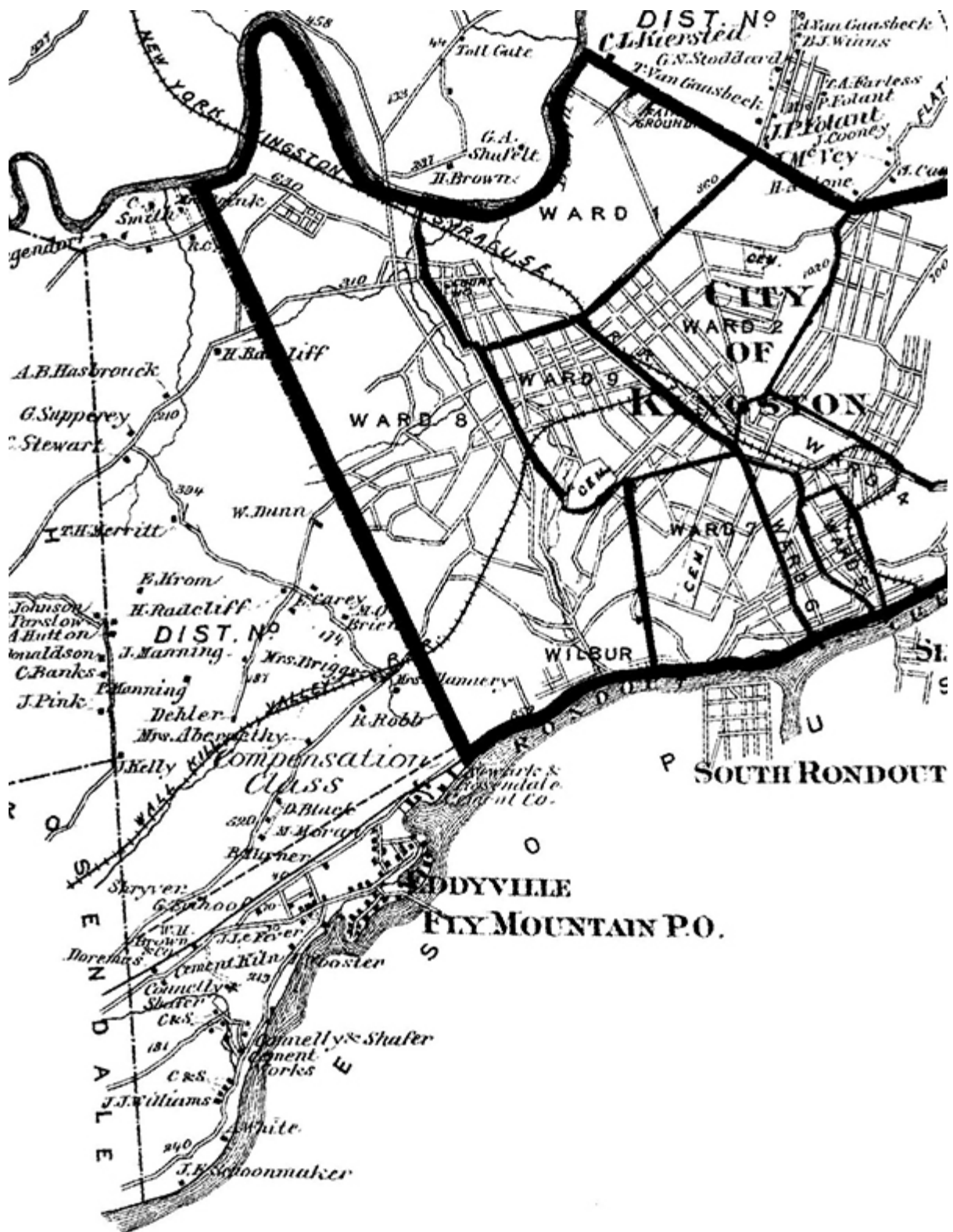


Entrance to Greenkill Park. Creek Locks Road. Circa 1914. From an advertising brochure. FHK Archives.

The resort could also be accessed via Greenkill Road in Bloomington and by an entrance on Dewitt Mills Road where a stone pillar can still be seen. The Greenkill Creek flowed through the Park emptying into the Rondout Creek not far from the entrance gate.

The resort was developed by the Consolidated Rosendale Cement Company on the site of a former limestone quarry and cement mill. An 1843 newspaper advertisement offering the property for sale stated that the cement mill was known as never failing.

The Rosendale Cement Works with Watson Lawrence as its principal owner had rapidly expanded their operations at that time and needed capital to meet mortgage obligations. In the 1875 Beers County Atlas of Ulster County a detailed Kingston map shows the property owned by the Connelly and Schafer Cement Works.



In 1875 the future site of Greenkill Park, located south of Eddyville on the Rondout, was owned by the Connelly and Schafer Cement Works. Beer's Atlas of Ulster County, 1875.

In 1932 Max Schmeling (1905-2005), the German World Heavyweight Champion boxer chose Greenkill Park, called Greenkill Lodge at the time, as his training site in preparation for a title defense against Jack Sharkey from Boston. Max arrived in Rondout via the Rhinebeck Ferry on the evening of May 11th. Thousands of local citizens were on hand and a gala parade led by the American Legion Drum Cops headed up Broadway to City Hall where Kingston's Mayor Eugene Carey presented Schmeling with an 18-inch key to the city. The parade continued up Broadway disbanding at Pearl Street and Clinton Avenue. Automobiles in the parade were decorated with American and German flags. A banquet with more than 300 guests followed at the Greenkill Lodge.



Max Schmeling
World's Heavyweight Champion
at Greenkill Lodge
Kingston, N.Y.

Max Schmeling. Postcard. FHK Archives.

Max adapted readily to his new surroundings. Instead of doing the requisite roadwork of a boxer he would get up mid-morning and play golf and tennis each day. The New York boxing writers' fraternity was surprised at Schmeling's choice of the training site. One United Press writer quipped "Max Schmeling, the German contender, has pitched his training camp in Kingston, N.Y., a fur trading post up the Hudson." Local officials were not amused.



Greenkill Lodge Billboard. 1932. Carl Modjeska Collection, FHK.

New York Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt and his wife Eleanor visited the training camp in late May. FDR spoke to Schmeling in German and then watched him spar with three partners for 20 minutes.



Max Schmeling meeting New York State Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt at Greenkill Lodge May 31, 1932. Photograph FHK Archives.

In a 15 round split decision Schmeling lost his heavyweight title to Jack Sharkey on June 21st at an outdoor arena in Long Island City before a crowd of 70,000 people.

Following the excitement of the Schmeling interlude the resort experienced declining activity during the depression years. In 1934 the Kingston Trust Company (the precursor of the current Key Bank) took over the title to the property when mortgage payments were unmet. In March of 1937, a purchaser from New York City acquired the 177-acre property from the bank for \$50,000. The property was promptly resold to another party who

then sold it to 26 women known as the “Divine Angels,” followers of the evangelist Father Divine (1877-1965) of Harlem. Father Divine wanted Greenkill Park to become the headquarters of his interracial peace movement.



Father Divine leading his followers at one of his Hudson River resort properties. 1938. Kingston Daily Freeman. March 9, 2017.

On July 8, 1937, the steamer, State of Delaware, brought 1,755 Father Divine followers from New York City to Kingston for the grand opening of the newly renovated property which was called “The Promised Land.” The steamer docked on the Strand at the Stone Dock and the followers managed to find their way to the resort which was about three miles away. The celebration lasted two days. Parades on the grounds featured marchers carrying signs that read “Peace” and “Father Divine is God.”

Four months later in November the large inn at the resort burned to the ground. The origin of the blaze was uncertain. Father Divine's properties did not carry insurance and the inn was never rebuilt. Greenkill Park was no longer considered as a Father Divine headquarters, but remained a vacation resort for his followers. Two other Ulster County resorts on the Hudson River would become Father Divine's replacements for Greenkill Park- the Elverhoj Art colony at Milton and the Krum Elbow property across the river from the FDR home in Hyde Park.

In 1971 a neglected Greenkill Park was one of the last of many Divine properties to sell in Ulster County. It was purchased by a lumber company and became a large sand and gravel mine which continues to operate today. A giant banner reading "Duke's Pit" stretches across its entry on Dewitt Mills Road.



*Duke's Pit, a sand and gravel business at the former site of Greenkill Park.
Photograph December 2020.*

The demise of the natural cement industry along the Rondout Creek brought Greenkill Park to life, and the resort provided us with some interesting stories in our local history. Except for a few stone gate pillars no vestiges of Greenkill Park remain. Quarrying of natural resources has resumed.



Stone gate post at main entry to Greenkill Park. December 2020.

Further Sources:

- “Greenkill Park,” a 48-page advertising brochure. Freeman Publishing Co., Kingston, N.Y. 1914
- Carleton Mabee. *Promised Land; Father Divine’s Interracial Communities in Ulster County*. New York, Purple Mountain Press, 2008