

## Hillsdale, A History

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Hillsdale Town Historian

At the time of the American Revolution, the Taconic hill country was still basically an “unbroken wilderness,” in the words of a standard history of New York State. Most of what is now the Town of Hillsdale belonged to the Van Rensselaer family, major beneficiaries of the Dutch patroon system, and much of the modern town was within the manor of Rensselaerwyck. Colonial maps show that “Renslaerwick” also included Nobletown and Spencertown. The present location of Route 23 follows the line separating Rensselaer lands from Livingston Manor. Baronial farmlands were leased to proprietors and rented to tenant farmers. Much of upstate New York, including the vast Upper Manor of the Livingstons on the west side of the Hudson, resembled the old European feudal system.

With the Revolutionary War, that system was ready for change. The Hudson Valley was one of the chief cradles of American independence, especially with the major battles fought around Saratoga and Ticonderoga. Much closer to the present Hillsdale, it furnished a route for one of the more heroic achievements of the battle for independence. Colonel Henry Knox, then only 25 and a former bookseller from Boston, joined with his brother in volunteering to retrieve munitions and cannon that had been captured by Ethan Allen and, improbable as it now seems, transported them over the snowy countryside to provide vital assistance for General Washington’s troops near Boston. The junction of county road 21 and Route 22, the site of the original Nobletown (the former name of Hillsdale), is a good place from which to appreciate Col. Knox’s journey as the team dragged “a noble train of artillery” along part of the Great Road that ran from Albany to Boston through Mitchell Street and White Hill to Route 71 and into Massachusetts.

An early map of Berkshire County in Massachusetts places the eastern portions of Copake, Hillsdale, Austerlitz, Canaan, Lebanon, and Stephentown in Massachusetts. Overlapping boundary claims helped to spark the anti-rent agitation, which spread to other areas of the state, where some operated as secret societies and became politically potent. Much of the disturbance centered in the Taconic region. Annals of that unsettling period invariably note the prominence of Robert Noble. Noble was the son of one of the original New England settlers of what became known as Hillsdale in 1791 but had been called Nobletown since the 1750s. Noble had already managed to round up several proprietors accused of abusing tenant interests and having them jailed in Springfield. The younger Noble’s armed resistance finally forced the hand of the

governor to use the infantry to drive him back into Massachusetts. New York's new constitution, ratified in 1846, made sure that feudal tenures were forever prohibited.

So hectic was this period in New York's history that one prominent resident, John Collin, a Republican congressman, noted in the introduction to his early history of the town that the "turbulence in Hillsdale for three-fourths of a century after its first settlement by civilized people and the different nationalities of those people has prevented any historic record being kept of them, and their scores of cemeteries, not being under legal protection, have become to a great extent obliterated." So spotty are early Hillsdale records that many of the registries of land titles are only now available thanks to a bound volume in the possession of the Berkshire County Court's archive center. The papers are in a former church located on Park Square in Pittsfield—another reminder of the Massachusetts claim to what is now much of Hillsdale. Building fires, a prominent hazard of that era, accounted for other losses of information, especially when churches were consumed by flames.

The achievement of independence led to the gradual implementation of some of the ideals of the Enlightenment. Foremost among these reforms was representative government. New York State increased the number of its counties in 1786, carving Columbia out of what had been the southeastern part of Albany, and, just four years before that, right on the heels of the end of the Revolutionary War, the legislature cut out part of Claverack and created Hillsdale. Hillsdale was the third largest town in the county with 48.3 square miles, exceeded only by Chatham and Austerlitz. The county seat was also moved from Claverack to Hudson. Such changes, limited as they were, involved the very gradual post-revolutionary process of making government more accessible to the community.

The population of Hillsdale was over 4,700 in 1800, a highpoint in the history of the town. In common with other hill towns in the region, farms in Hillsdale raised sheep and furnished large amounts of cloth. One of the last textile mills was located near where Hunt Road meets Route 22. Only two sawmills remained by 1855, down from eight in 1820. The town also had four grist mills, including one at what became known as Murray's Corners (at the intersection of Route 23 and Collins Street in East Hillsdale), which was owned by Henry Walter Murray. Parla Foster operated a tavern there, and another one of the earliest taverns was run by Gaius Stebbins in the hamlet.

Beneath the hills that range from 650 feet above sea level to over 1,600 feet, were veins of iron ore which were mined intermittently in the 19th century. After the discovery of an ore deposit in 1800, some three miles northeast of the hamlet of Hillsdale, some sporadic iron mining did take place later. Another economic

boost came at mid-century. The New York & Harlem Railroad came to Hillsdale in 1852. The line connected Chatham with New York City, and was credited with bringing a gradual upward spike in population, from 2,123 in 1850 to 2,552 the year before the firing at Fort Sumter.

The Civil War, the longest and bloodiest conflict on American soil, changed the nation, leading to considerable population growth through significant immigration. By 1870, three hundred people lived in the hamlet. Hillsdale was on its way toward becoming the most important stop on the Harlem Railroad south of Chatham. Immigration, which began to rise at mid-century, was reaching new levels. Such growth would not have been possible without the intersection of the expanded market for labor and new technology. Westinghouse air brakes became a boon for railroading, and so was the Bessemer process for coal and steel. Railroads connected cattle country with markets in the cities, and modern refrigeration made that transportation possible.

The legendary “Robber Barons,” the money men, led the era, their capital stimulating the process, together with their energy and shrewdness: the Rockefellers, the Morgans, the Vanderbilts, the Whitneys and, not least of all, the inventions of Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Alva Edison. All helped to create the “Gilded Age,” an era of new fortunes that contrasted with pockets of urban poverty. Such changes, starting with New York State’s Erie Canal, also created the greater demands of the new, long-distance competition, markets on a much larger field of play.

Yet, despite the early post-war gain in population, Hillsdale’s actually declined by the last part of the 19th century, reflecting the national shift from farm to city. Agriculture was dominant, hay and grain the chief farm products during the two post-Civil War decades. Then, when grain prices fell, came the rise of dairy farming, taking advantage of the growing urban markets to the south. Beginning with the splendid harvests of the 1870s and 1880s, producing such commodities as milk, butter and cheese, with easy access to the railroad, remained central to Hillsdale’s economy. Hillsdale, with 103 dairy farms, soon had the highest percentage of cows of any town in the county.

In 1880, fifteen years after General Robert E. Lee’s surrender at Appomattox, the Hillsdale Herald reported that “Good roads diverge in every direction, from the village over which the pleasure seeker can at will speed along to Copake Lake with its charming scenery and excellent bass fishing; or to the retreat of cool splashing Bash Bish, or the panoramic elevation of White’s Hill, or Mt. Everett, or the beautiful villages of Egremont, Lenox, and Stockbridge. With headquarters at the Hillsdale House, time would fly along so that the happy searcher for health and amusement would be loath to leave until the yellow October leaves began to

fall, and the Bitter Sweet grew scarlet.” Oldtimers agree that there were more roads and byways then than there are today.

Land supported over half of the population. Those not dependent on farming worked as carpenters, laborers, and merchants. Henry D. Harvey, for example, was a jeweler, and John M. Albert was a mason. Allen Sheldon was a merchant. Charles F. Brusie ran a hotel; and so on, most recorded in the county’s directory. Other families, with names still familiar to Hillsdale over a century later, included Bushnell, Collin, Decker, Ostrander, and Stalker. Major Bullock, who built the Bull & Bullock lumber and feed business right after the Civil War, would best be remembered as the great grandfather of Edmond Herrington. At the center of the hamlet, Hillsdale House became a seasonal attraction for visitors enjoying the bucolic hills and dales of the Harlem Valley and the surrounding countryside. On the Shun Pike near the border with Massachusetts and not far from where a vein of iron ore was first discovered in 1800, Seymour Winchell ran a place where visitors could enjoy the cool breezes, the Summit House. Just a few miles to the north, at Green River, the La Pierre House operated by Pierre D. Van Hoesen, was lauded as a “fine summer resort” with twenty-one guest rooms.

In matters of faith, Hillsdale also reflected the changing nation. From early on, private homes were used for religious services. Long before the Civil War, the “methodism” of John Wesley challenged the teachings of John Calvin among growing numbers of post-Revolutionary, post-Enlightenment Americans. But the change was not without local resistance. Stones were sometimes thrown at private homes, where such citizens as Murray Corners tavern-keeper, Parla Foster, sometimes led services. Still, even in that limited area, the number of churches multiplied, eight in three locations in the town by 1851.

Methodism had helped to splinter some of the earlier congregations, such as the First Baptist Church that dated back to 1787 and was Hillsdale’s first. The only surviving accounts tell us that the doctrinal differences spurred the birth of about three dozen congregations. With the generosity of the mill owning Richmond family, land was acquired in what was then called “Sheep Hole” (along the present County Route 21, now indicated by a New York State Education Department historical sign), to establish a Union Church, which was built in 1822. The house of worship later became known as the “Downing Church,” named for one of the region’s oldest Methodists, although the church itself continued to serve Baptists. Another church, the North Hillsdale Methodist Church (known for a time as the Wesleyan Chapel) followed in 1837.

The Foster family continued to be prominent in the Methodist movement. A new church went up in 1845 on land contributed by Stephen Foster, but fire shortened

its life and destroyed early records. It became better known as the forerunner of the United Methodist Church of Hillsdale, which was completed in 1847. Already organized and functioning by 1832 in the northeastern Hillsdale community of Green River was a Presbyterian church.

Peter H. Stott's recent survey of the county, written for the Columbia County Historical Society, also reports that "The first settlement in the western part of town may have been about 1745, when the German Martin Krum, a member of the Dutch Reformed Church in Claverack, is reported to have purchased 800 acres from the Van Rensselaer family. By 1769 there were evidently enough families in eastern Claverack and western Hillsdale to form a new church in the western part of Hillsdale, the 'Reform Lutheran Unity Church,' now referred to as the 'Krum Church.'" Other early houses of worship included the First Presbyterian Church, which went up in the hamlet in 1837 and, a few miles to the north, the German Evangelical Lutheran Church just east of tiny Harlemville, which served more recent arrivals.

Newcomers to Hillsdale soon found that, however pleasant the summers, the region was far from immune from the climactic extremes of upstate New York. The mid-80s became notable for a few such events. A rainstorm on July 23, 1887, hit hardest in the West Hillsdale and Craryville area, and resulted in "great creeks running where streams were never heard of before; barns overturned or swept away; bridge timbers strewn all over the lots, embankments swept out from in under the railroad tracks leaving them suspended in the air." Mills along the Roeliff Jansen Kill were mostly destroyed. Two men, a Mr. Haywood and a Mr. Brusie, were at work at the nearby plow works when the flood struck. They barely just managed to live to tell about it.

The following year, just as folks were enjoying a balmy spell, the same snowstorm responsible for dumping the famous Blizzard of '88 on New York City hit Hillsdale in mid-March. Drifts, powered by seventy-mile an hour winds and fed by up to thirty-one inches of snow, piled up to three feet, making roads impassable, and taking perhaps scores of lives. Nor, just a few months later, did nature spare the area from further damage. A July cloudburst north of the hamlet dropped a devastating foot of rain in less than an hour, destroying bridges, mills and houses.

Considerable political unrest also affected Hillsdale. A revived Ku Klux Klan came along in 1915, this time more virulent than its original agenda of ending Reconstruction. Hatred was directed toward such minorities as Roman Catholics and Jews. Ongoing throughout the period was the most intense implementation of Jim Crow conditions, with violent actions against blacks in addition to denials of voting rights, lynchings, rigid enforcement of segregation, and an effective

continuation of slavery by other means. In 1915, after Mexican outlaw Pancho Villa led his gang in a raid on U. S. soil and attacked the New Mexico town of Columbus, President Wilson launched an Expeditionary Mission that soon involved two-thirds of the regular army. The public was generally supportive, but the people were far more divided about what German interference with U.S. interests on the high seas meant for the possibility of intervention in the great war that had already broken out in Europe in 1914. Potential enemies were everywhere, especially among dissenters and aliens. As doubts about patriotism mounted, there were more calls for greater loyalty. Teddy Roosevelt urged “Americanism” as an antidote to dissent. As there appeared to be no way to avoid getting involved in the European war, especially with attacks on neutral shipping, Wilson declared that “there is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight.”

As re-election neared in 1916, the president also began to promote a preparedness campaign. The promotion of patriotism fell into line; that sentiment was re-invigorated when the Republican Party held its quadrennial presidential nominating convention in June. Devotion to the spirit of Americanism grew. It was in that atmosphere, fifty-one years after General Lee’s surrender at Appomattox, that a Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument was dedicated in Crellin Park in Hillsdale’s center, made possible by a ten thousand dollar bequest from Civil War veteran John K. Cullin

The celebration was clearly a reaffirmation of Americanism and, on that day especially, of Hillsdale’s devotion to the republic, as hundreds of automobiles packed the center of the village. Many of the 2,500 present came by train; so did the band from Philmont, which led the parade of war veterans in decorated automobiles, and members of the Masonic fraternity, to a platform just east of the monument. The band played the “Star Spangled Banner.” Atop the Vermont granite base stood two bronze Civil War figures, a soldier and a sailor flanking a flag. A bronze tablet on the front side depicted the naval battle of the Monitor and the Merrimac. The western side had a list of the area’s 149 war veterans. One local man read a poem he had written for the occasion. He called it “Columbia’s Brave Volunteers.” The Hillsdale Harbinger of July 7, 1916, duly reprinted the text, which concluded with the following stanza:

The monument stands on the Old Village Green,  
Erected in honor of all The heroes of Hillsdale  
who followed the flag, When the nation sent  
out the first call. We read on the tablet the names  
there inscribed, In letters so clear and so plain—  
And we will say to the world we will fight as they fought,  
Should the Call come to Colors again.

Walk south from the war monument and continue down Anthony Street through the heart of the old hamlet. Pass the old post office at the corner of Coldwater and move on to the bend in the road, stopping short of the Copake town line but approaching the old Agway building, where a unit of the old Chatham Shirt Factory stood in the 1920s. Then head right, not the sharp angle that leads to Ed Herrington's store and lumberyard, but diagonally following the Anthony Street Extension. Follow the little bridge over the gully. Trains once ran there, but now the road over the former trestle winds to the right and loops around the white building on the site of the old milk depot. Follow what may be called Hillsdale's "Historic Trail" and pass the remains of the foundry, now a ramshackle, abandoned rust-colored building. The old railroad station stood across the road from what had been, for over a century, main gateway to the city for commuter and commercial transportation. But, in 1972, the Harlem Division of the Penn Central Railroad suddenly disappeared. And that was that. Hillsdale lost its passenger service. Four years later, freight was also gone.

George (Bud) Atwood, Jr., a retired maintenance chief of the old Roe Jan School on Route 22 whose father once worked for Herrington's, stood at the edge of what was once one of the three depots along the Upper Harlem where dairy farmers left their milk to be collected, then shipped by rail to be processed before delivery to markets. The old "factory" has been converted into an apartment house, just a relic from the town's "old days." Atwood remembers that the arriving trains were "hot and heavy" on summer days with some 300 people getting off at the station on Friday nights loaded with city weekenders. Yes, his two listeners responded with approval; that's the way it was; they remembered it well. In fact, a hotel opposite the station owned by a guy named Mickey Flynn and known to everyone as "the Bloody Bucket," serviced the needs and desires of the arrivals, and so did some of the nearby boardinghouses, big frame buildings with large front porches for the convenience of warm-weather visitors.

The two apartment house women who stood by knew Bud, as did just about everybody else. They also remembered the "good old days" of Hillsdale, when the train dropped off the city folks on weekends and served the farmers most of the rest of the time, connecting the metropolis for supplies and produce from the country. Trucks later took over the freight cargo, and the Agway store on Anthony Street inherited the feed business.

Increasingly, former train passengers began to find their way north to Columbia County by using the Taconic State Parkway. Scenic for most of the way, its viewpoints were even grander as it extended northward during the 1940's. The newer, faster Interstate 684 from Westchester County gave motorists an even quicker escape from urban sprawl.

In those years after the Great Depression and the Wall Street crash of '29, somewhere between a quarter and a third of Americans lost full-time jobs. Farmers all over had been on the skids long since; hard times on the farm beat out disaster on Wall Street by a few years. But the crisis was deepened by a collapsing banking system and misguided "protection" under the Hawley-Smoot Tariff of 1930. An administration in Washington still too faithful to old nostrums intensified the crisis. Millions, left on their own, struggled as best as they could, and without unemployment compensation, Social Security, or other social safeguards now taken for granted like Medicare and Medicaid, to say nothing about medical insurance. Private charities tried to fill the vacuum, but there was too little to work with.

Americans went on, as one historian has written, with "a restlessness of the undirected, unpatterned energies. Every freight train moving across the land bore its quota of homeless men and boys, who wandered from place to place, living on handouts and odd jobs as they looked for steady work. Along every highway were hitchhikers, thumbing their way from here to there, not knowing or much caring where 'there' might be."

All too often the "there" was back on the farm. A slow return to the land characterized the desperation about trying to survive in the cities; indeed, the quest for "bread" marked movement everywhere, resembling the migrating Oakies who pushed on to California in John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath. Among those returning to the land, Hillsdale got its share. A population low of just 968 in 1930 rose ever so gradually toward the end of the decade. Dairy farming, already the region's chief industry and centered in the Harlem Valley, took another step forward.

Peter H. Stott, reporting for the Columbia County Historical Society, has already described how Hillsdale fared:

"In the 1890s, dairying grew substantially in Hillsdale as fresh milk began to replace butter as the chief product of the dairy farms. Several farms were already shipping milk to New York directly from the trackside milk platforms. One of the earliest milk depots, if not the earliest in the county, was that built by Slawson Brothers in the early 1890s to ship milk to New York City. Slawson built a milk receiving plant where all the farmers could bring their cans of milk for bottling and direct shipment to New York. Within a few years, many of the surrounding railroad hamlets in Copake and Ancram also had milk depots. Initially, many of the milk stations, like Slawson Brothers of Hillsdale, did their own bottling. Not long after that, however, bottling was discontinued and all the milk was shipped directly in cans to a central bottling facility in New York City.

There is no question that, as former Hillsdale supervisor Calvin Sheldon recalled dairy farming became the town's major industry. It was the most successful instrument for local recovery, helping the area through that greatest internal disaster that had befallen Americans since the Civil War itself, the Great Depression.

Down through the First World War, while creameries were built in such communities as Harlemville, Slawson remained Hillsdale's largest employer. The eleven men who worked in the milk depot and the office staff of one comprised the largest milk plant below Chatham. Farms in the area were able to supply the factory with a daily delivery of 360 forty-quart cans of milk. Just as the war came to an end, the site was bought by a major metropolitan area supplier, Sheffield Farms.

More than any other town in the county, Hillsdale became a regional center for the transportation of goods to New York and elsewhere. Cattle pens held calves for shipment, and there was a big barn for hay, but competition forced change, so Hillsdale's dairy farmers joined hands. With enough dairies to produce two hundred cans of milk a day, they formed a farm cooperative, the Hillsdale Producers Association.

At the outset, the enterprise was all Hillsdale's. But expansion quickly followed after incentives encouraged milk supplies from farmers in the region. "The Hillsdale Co-op," writes Stott, was a success beyond anyone's expectations, and by the 1950's, the plant was the largest of any in the county, taking milk from farmers as far away as Kinderhook, East Chatham, Germantown, and New Lebanon." At the same time, with the aid of the Co-op, electricity came to the farms. At its peak, in 1948, Ancram, Copake and Hillsdale together had four thousand heads of cattle.

With the exception of Dutchess County, Hillsdale moved ahead faster than the state as a whole, Dutchess, along with Albany and Ulster, took the lead during the next decade. Hillsdale, although later falling behind the Mid-Hudson area, still made more progress than the rest of Columbia County.

The Producers Association, as it turned out, was but a temporary source of relief for Hillsdale's dairy farmers. A variety of forces beyond their control buffeted them during the next few decades. Terrible weather was always a destructive force beyond anyone's control, but the erratic wet, cold spring of early 1973, the cost-price squeeze during the Nixon years, and the price freeze on retail foods sacrificed those who tried to live off the land. Increasingly, aided by tax code interpretations that encouraged those with the means to invest in land, hard-

pressed farmers were tempted to sell out. The net result was that the little farmers sold out and the bigger farmers got bigger.

A basic way of life was being threatened. Zoning changes threatened to boost the price of new homes beyond the reach of farmers' children. Still, retaining the "rural character" of neighborhoods became a major theme. Town boards had a volatile issue on their hands. Compromises were tailored for different parts of the various communities. Copake led off in the spring of 1973 and Hillsdale then followed. Plots with a minimum of three acres became the rule in many of the outlying areas.

In a time of change, others went the other way. One Hillsdale land owner pushed for the commercial upgrading of the property adjacent to the junction of routes 22 and 23. Immediately, any such growth faced the need for a sewer system. By early 1973, plans were drawn up to buy land just north of that main intersection for a sewage treatment facility. Those 6.82 acres were expected to cost about a thousand dollars per acre, enough, it was hoped, to handle the 106 residences and businesses then within the hamlet. Town Supervisor Calvin Sheldon, weighing all this, worried about the availability of state or federal funding for the project. He soon got his answer: the town's ambitions for a sewer and controlled commercial growth then got a fatal setback. In June of 1973, President Nixon, then also contending with escalating inflation even as his Watergate crisis grew more severe, vetoed a federal bill designed to underwrite the construction of municipal sewage treatment plants. Many years later, Supervisor Sheldon recalled that "If there had been money, it would have been all done, but the hamlet and its shops were left dependent on septic tanks.

Other, more positive, things happened. In 1969, the Roe Jan School on Route 22, having served the community since 1933, joined a new consolidation that brought together two rural school districts to form an educational jurisdiction of almost three hundred square miles, a move that was forced by overcrowding and aging facilities. The first class graduated from the new Taconic Hills Central School in June of 1972. Consolidation also modernized the area's phone systems when the Copake and Columbia-Rensselaer companies combined in 1971 to form the Taconic Telephone Company. John Benedict (Ben) Ackley, the president and chief operating officer whose family had begun the Copake Company in 1908, announced the laying down of thirty thousand more feet of cables.

Then the trains simply stopped running. Passengers boarding train number 922, the evening train from Chatham on Penn Central's Harlem Division at 6:55 a.m. on March 20, 1972, reached Grand Central Station, as usual. They had gone by way of Martindale, Hillsdale, Millerton and Dover Plains. But they could

not return. Nor was there any alternative transportation. The trainmaster at the terminal in New York City blandly explained, "We don't care how they get home." Their expected train, number 935 northbound to Chatham, would stop at Dover Plains.

That was it. A decision earlier in the day by the Third Court of Appeals in Philadelphia upheld a U.S. District Court ruling to enable the Penn Central to end service on the Upper Harlem, something they had been trying to do ever since their acquisition of the line had included other cost-cutting, slimming down measures. So passenger service from the metropolis to Hillsdale came to a dead halt after 120 years. Four years later, almost exactly to the day, freight trains were also discontinued.

In Hillsdale, the Roe Jan Chamber of Commerce fought back. Public hearings played to packed auditoriums. The lead opposition group, which had been formed as early as 1961 to combat early glimmerings by the New York Central aimed at abandoning the Upper Harlem, the Hudson Valley Transportation Association, waged increasingly futile battles. But the trains to Hillsdale were gone.

As with change everywhere, the absence of a rail line accounted for only part of the change. Abandonment of the line naturally related to cost-effectiveness for the company; whatever the effect of that loss was to the Harlem Valley, the trend that marked the final years of the 20th century in Hillsdale and into the 21st was probably inevitable. Selling land was more profitable than working on it. The number of working farms declined. The population of milk cows in Columbia County declined from nineteen thousand heads in 1978 to ten thousand in 1998.

In addition to those dealing in dairy products, the 545 farms in the county, as of 1998, raised various livestock, including beef cattle, calves, fruits and berries. Others tended to nurseries and greenhouses.

Change threatened in other ways. Local residents remained determined to preserve the rural qualities of their environment. When, in 2005, long and costly efforts by the St. Lawrence Cement Company to build a plant in near the eastern shore of the Hudson River were finally squashed, those who prized nature above all won the day. The leader of an environmental group that fought the proposal, Ned Sullivan of Scenic Hudson, seizing on the environmental factors behind the decision by the State of New York, hailed the victory as sustaining the primacy of natural resources rather than degrading "the world-class culture and historic assets of the region."

One welcome change was an upgrading of the district's educational facilities.

Other than the need to upgrade the buildings, something had to be done to relieve the district of the high cost and time required to bus students to distant facilities. Finally, desperate to sell the idea to the district's taxpayers, the school board called on Rhinebeck Architecture Planning PC to draw up viable plans. The resulting complex covered 350,000 square feet in Craryville off Route 23, west of Hillsdale. The total project, approved by the voters and constructed at a cost of \$43.5 million, revolutionized the Taconic Hills School District's plant. The complex centralized the entire educational system; the result constituted one of the largest school buildings in the state.

Designed as two main schools and a community center within a single building (a swimming pool was later added), classrooms were clustered by grade levels or departments. The site was further improved for by a state-of-the art performing arts center, ideal also for such community theater as "Earth Angels," a charitable fund-raising musical group. The facility opened for classes on September 1, 1999.

The first Hillsdale newspapers of record were the *Hillsdale Herald* in 1879 and the *Hillsdale Harbinger* in 1887, which continued publication into the 1940s. *The Roe Jan Inquirer* had a brief run in the early 1970s, and in 1973 Elinor Mettler began to publish the *Roe Jan Independent* as a local weekly. Its scope enlarged beyond the immediate Roe Jan area, reaching an average circulation of 9,600, making it the largest in the county. The *Independent*, as it was later called, was acquired by the Journal News Company in 1987, which ran nearly two dozen regional papers. After eight years of ownership, the corporation closed down *The Independent* during the economic recession of 2009. However, the former paper's editor, Parry Teasdale, promptly followed by putting out a new weekly, *The Columbia Paper*, which appeared both online and in print.

Hillsdale's effort to create a modern sewage treatment facility for the hamlet was resurrected in the late 1990s. The immediate beneficiaries would obviously be those who live in the hamlet and the area's shopkeepers. Supervisor Bill Anglum came into office with that as a mission, and so did Art Baer when he became supervisor in 2004. He won re-election in 2007 by defeating combined Republican and Democratic opposition by running on a bipartisan insurgent ticket called Hillsdale First.

Overcoming local objections that involved feasibility of land acquisition and costs, prospects for a sewer system brightened when both the town board and the hamlet's taxpayers approved the project by a 40 to 15 vote in February of 2005. After the acquisition of privately owned property and approval by the state's Department of Environmental Conservation, and necessary groundwork done by a committee chaired by town councilman August Sena, Hillsdale's sewer became

a reality. Completion of the project at the end of 2008 was hailed as a great forward step by both merchants and residents of the hamlet.