

History of the City and County of Schenectady, New York (1860)

Schenectady County



This county was formed from Albany, March 7, 1809. It is centrally distant 20 miles from Albany, and contains 221 sq. miles. The greater part lies between Mohawk River and Schoharie Creek, one town only lying n. of the Mohawk. The surface consists of the Mohawk Valley and an upland, generally much broken by ridges and isolated hills, 200 to 350 feet above the river. The highlands are the northern continuation of the Helderbergh and Schoharie Mts. The underlying rock is generally the shales of the Hudson River group, which crop out in the valleys and the bottoms of the ravines. In portions of Glenville and Duanesburgh this rock is underlaid by birdseye limestone, from which are obtained both lime and stone for building. The greater part of the surface is covered with a thick deposit of drift, consisting principally of clay in the w. part and sand in the e. The rocks crop out on the banks of the streams and form the declivities of the steeper hills. The soil in the w. part is a tenacious, clayey loam, underlaid by hardpan on the hills, and in the e. a light, unproductive sand. The valley of the Mohawk consists of a deep, rich alluvium, well adapted to tillage, and extensively devoted to the cultivation of broomcorn. ([595-1](#))

The principal streams are Mohawk River, Schoharie Creek, and Normans Kil, and their branches. The valleys of these streams are generally bordered by the steep declivities of the uplands, rising to a height of about 300 feet. Many of the smaller streams have worn deep gullies in the loose drift deposits, giving to the surface a very broken character. These small streams are mostly dry in summer. The fine alluvial flats near Schenectady, extending 5 miles w. on the s. side of the river, were called by the first settlers the "*Bouwlandt*." (595-2) A tract 2 miles in extent, n. of the river, was called the "*Maalwyck*;" (595-3) and a tract on both sides, 4 miles w. of the city, was known as the "*Woestina*." (595-4) A region immediately about Schenectady was called "*Oron-nygh-wurrie-gughre*;" the hills s. were known as the "*Yan-ta-puch-a-berg*;" (595-5) and those on both sides of the river above the city were called "*Tou-ar-e-u-ne*." The streams of "*Woestina*" were "*Verf Kil*," (595-6) "*Zantzee Kil*," (595-7) and "*Righelbrigh Kil*." (595-8) The valleys are best adapted to tillage and the hills to pasturage. (595-9) Manufactures are chiefly limited to the city of Schenectady. (595-10) In Glensville are about a dozen broom factories, employing 450 persons.

The county seat is located at Schenectady City. (595-11) The courthouse and clerk's office are both located on Union St.: the former contains the courtroom, jail, sheriff's and supervisors' rooms, (595-12) and the latter the clerk's and surrogate's offices. The poorhouse is located on a farm of 116 acres, on the Albany Road, just e. of the city. It has, on an average, about 75 inmates, and the farm yields a revenue of \$1,200. There are 5 newspapers published in the county. (595-13)

The great flat upon the Mohawk w. of "*Fort Orange*," and where the city of Schenectady now stands, was bought of the natives in July, 1661, in the name of Arent Van Corlaer; (596-1) and settlement was commenced during the same year. It was under the charge of 5 commissioners until Nov. 1, 1684, when Gov. Dongan granted a patent confirming previous rights and extending the territory. (596-2) On the night between the 8th and 9th of Feb. 1690, N.S., (596-3) the settlement — then consisting of about 80 houses — was surprised by a party of about 300 French and Indians, and nearly every house was burned. Sixty-three persons were killed, and 27 were carried to Canada as prisoners. The night was intensely cold, and the nearest place of refuge was Albany, to which a few escaped after much suffering. (596-4) In 1702 Ryer Schermerhorn became sole trustee; and in 1705 a new patent was issued, conferring certain township privileges. On the 23d of Oct. 1765, the place was created a borough, with the rights and immunities incident to these corporations. (596-5) From 1726 to the Revolution the township of Schenectady sent a representative to the General Assembly. During the war the village was fortified and garrisoned at the public expense, and many families from the Upper Mohawk sought protection here from the incursions of the Tories and Indians. (596-6) For several years after 1779 a large number of friendly Oneida and Tuscarora families, driven from their homes by the hostile tribes, were supported in this vicinity at the expense of the General Government. At the return of peace the settlement shared in the general prosperity. A new impulse was given to business by the improvements effected by the Western Inland Navigation Company, which enabled large boats to make longer voyages. (596-7) Upon the completion of the Erie Canal the Mohawk navigation was entirely superseded. For several years after the completion of the

railroad from Albany in 1831, large quantities of merchandise were sent here to be shipped on the canal, saving the delay of the circuitous route and numerous locks on the canal between Schenectady and Troy. (596-8). In 1832 a railroad was built to Saratoga, in 1835, to Utica, and in 1843, to Troy. In 1849 several plank roads were built, which since have been mostly abandoned.

Duanesburgh (596-9) was erected as a township, by patent, March 13, 1765, and it was first recognized as a town March 22, 1788. It lies in the s.w. corner of the county Its surface consists of an upland, broken by the narrow valleys and gullies of small streams. Schoharie Creek forms a portion of its w. boundary, and Normans Kil flows through the s. part. The hills that border upon these streams are steep, and in some places rocky. The other principal streams are Corrys Brook, Chuctenunda Creek, and Bozen Kil. Maria Pond and Featherstons Lake are 2 small bodies of water in the n. e. part, about 250 feet above the canal. The soil is principally a stiff, clay loam, with a slight intermixture of gravel. It is best adapted to pasturage. **Duanesburgh** (p.v.) contains about a dozen houses, **Quaker Street** (596-10) (p.v.) 30, **Mariaville** (596-11) (p.v.) 20, and **Bramans Corners** (p.v.) 18. **Eatons Corners** is a hamlet. Large tracts in this town were purchased by different parties between 1736 and 1770, (596-12) but no active measures of settlement were taken till about the time of its organization in 1765. During that year Duane, who had become an extensive proprietor, contracted with 20 Germans from Pennsylvania, of whom 16 came on and made a permanent settlement. (597-1) The first church (Christ's Church, Protestant Episcopal) was formed Aug. 3, 1795, and the church edifice was erected by Judge Duane. Rev. David Belden was the first rector. (597-2)

Glenville (597-3) was formed from Schenectady, April 14, 1820. It is the only town in the county n. of the Mohawk. The central and w. parts are occupied by rugged and wooded hills abruptly rising from the valley of the river to a height of 300 feet. The e. part is nearly level. The streams are Crabbs Kil, Chaugh-ta-noon-da, Aalplaats, (597-4), and Jan Wemps Creeks, and Verf Kil. The soil among the hills is a stiff clay, underlaid by hardpan, with an occasional outcrop of slate; and in the e. part it is a sandy and gravelly loam. The Mohawk intervalles are very fertile, and are chiefly devoted to the culture of broomcorn. **Glenville** (p.v.) contains 2 churches and 20 houses, **Scotia** (597-5) (p.v.) 2 churches and 266 inhabitants, **Reesville** 12 houses and a broom factory, and **High Mills** 13 houses, 1 grist and 2 saw mills, and woolen factory. **Hoffmans Ferry** (597-6) (p.o.) is a hamlet and railroad station. **East Glenville** and **Town Center** are post offices. Bridges connect this town with Schenectady and Niskayuna. Settlements were made about 1665, and were among the earliest in the county. (597-7) The Sanders House, in this town, was spared by the enemy when Schenectady was destroyed. (597-8) There are 5 churches in town. (597-9)

Niskayuna (597-10) was formed from Watervliet, (Albany County) March 7, 1809. A part of Schenectady was annexed in 1853. It lies upon the Mohawk, in the e. part of the county Its surface is mostly upland, terminating in steep bluffs upon the river valley. The intervalles are very rich and productive. A strip of land about 1 mile wide, extending back from the summits of the bluffs, has a hard, clay soil, and a considerable portion of it is swampy and unfit for

cultivation. Further s. the soil is sandy. **Watervliet Center** (p.o.) is within the limits of this town. **Niskayuna** is a hamlet in the s. e. corner. The first settlements were made about 1640. (597-11) The canal crosses the Mohawk into this town upon a magnificent stone aqueduct. (597-12) There is 1 church (Reformed Protestant Dutch) in town.

Princetown (597-13) was formed from Schenectady, (Albany County,) March 26, 1798. It lies a little w. of the center of the county Its surface consists of a broken upland, gently descending toward the s.e. The streams are Normans Kil in the s. and Zantzee Kil in the n. (597-14) The soil is a heavy clay loan, underpaid by hardpan, and is best adapted to grazing. Princeton (p.o.) is a hamlet. The town was chiefly conveyed to George Ingoldsby and Aaron Bradt, in 1737. William Corry afterward became owner, and formed a settlement, which was long known as "*Corrysbush*." The town was thinly settled at the time of the Revolution. The Princetown Academy, a Presb. institution, was opened here, on an extensive scale, in 1853, and was discontinued in 1856. There are a Presbyterian and a Reformed Protestant Dutch church in town.

Rotterdam was formed from Schenectady, April 14, 1820. A part of the city was annexed in 1853. It lies near the center of the county, upon the s. bank of the Mohawk. The surface consists of a broken, hilly region in the n.w., a level intervale extending from the center toward the s., and a high plain in the e. The soil upon the w. hills is a tough clay, underlaid by shale, which frequently crops out. The central valley or plain, 5 miles in extent, was called by the Dutch the "*Bouwlandt*." The soil is a deep alluvium. The e. plateau is sandy and barren. **Rotterdam**, **Mohawkville**, and **Factoryville** are hamlets. (597-15). Settlements were first made about 1661. (597-16) The first church was organized Aug. 29, 1800; Rev. Thomas Romeyn was the first pastor. (597-17)



Schenectady City was patented, with certain municipal rights, Nov. 4, 1684; chartered as a borough Oct. 23, 1765; incorporated as a district, March 24, 1772, as a town, March 7, 1788, and as a city, March 26, 1798. Princetown was set off in 1798, Rotterdam and Glenville in 1820 and parts of Niskayuna and Rotterdam in 1853. [\(598-1\)](#) It is situated on the Mohawk, and on the borders of one of the finest intervals in the State. A considerable amount of trade is carried on in the city by means of the canal and the railroads that center here; but the people are more largely engaged in manufactures. [\(598-2\)](#) The engine houses and repair shops of the N.Y.C. Railroad Company, are very extensive; and one of the largest locomotive manufactories in the country is located here. [\(598-3\)](#) This city is especially noted as the seat of Union College. This institution was incorporated by the regents, Feb. 25, 1795, and received its name from the cooperation and union of several religious denominations in its foundation. [\(598-4\)](#) A fund was first raised by private subscription to erect the necessary buildings and to defray the expenses of opening the school; [\(598-5\)](#) and this was increased by the avails of several lotteries authorized by the legislature, [\(598-6\)](#) by grants of land and money from the State, and by private donations. The total amount received from the State, up to 1822, for permanent investment, was \$331,612.13. In a will dated Dec. 28, 1855, Dr. Nott, the president of the college, bequeathed to the trustees \$555,000 for specific purposes and an additional fund for miscellaneous expenses. [\(598-7\)](#) The funds thus bequeathed were derived from the profits of certain investments of college funds, and amounts from other sources, which had been employed for the purpose of creating a fund for the endowment of the institution. The first college building was erected in the city; [\(598-8\)](#) but in 1814 a tract of land upon an eminence e. of the city was purchased, and the two principal

buildings were erected. (598-9) The site commands an extensive view of the city, the river, and the valley. The faculty of the college now consists of a president, 12 professors, 1 lecturer, and 3 tutors. The total number of students is 420, and has not materially varied from this number for a great number of years, the junior and senior classes being invariably larger than those that preceded them. A considerable number of students derive aid from the State fund, which is extended to students of limited means without reference to the profession they intend to follow. The college has received from E. C. Delavan, Esq., a magnificent donation of minerals and shells, known as the "Wheatley Collection," which was purchased for this purpose at a cost of \$10,000. Departments of Civil Engineering and Analytical Chemistry have been organized, and the facilities which they afford are of the most ample kind.

The *Public Schools* are under 8 commissioners, elected once in 2 years. There were, in 1857, 9 school districts, employing 3 male and 22 female teachers. The number of children between 4 and 21, was 3065, of whom 1729, or 56 per cent., attended the public schools. (598-10)

The first settlement was made in 1661, as already noticed. (598-11) As this was an advance frontier settlement, the compact part, at an early period, was enclosed by palisades. In 1690 the enclosure was in form of an oblong rectangle, with gates at the ends. The people, however, felt so secure that the gates were habitually left open, and no guard was kept; and hence it was easily entered by the enemy on the memorable 9th of Feb. 1690, N.S. The lives of 60 old persons and children were spared from the massacre. The settlement recovered slowly from the disaster, and not until the close of King William's War did it receive any considerable accessions. A new fort was built in May, 1690, which was garrisoned for many years. Another fort was built in 1735, and another in 1780. (599-1) The old fort stood at the intersection of Ferry and Front Sts. The first church (Reformed Protestant Dutch) was organized in 1684, and the building was erected on the s. end of Church St. in 1685. It was burned in 1690; (599-2) and a new building was erected, about 1702, on the site of the present church, corner of Union and Church Sts. (599-3) St. George's Church (Protestant Episcopal) was organized, in 1735, by Rev. H. Barclay, incorporated in 1766, and an edifice erected in 1768. (599-4) The first mail was brought to the town April 3, 1763. (599-5) The first English school was opened, under the care of Rev. Henry Barclay, in 1710. (599-6) The Vale Cemetery Association was formed Feb. 25, 1858. (599-7) The population of the city has slowly and steadily increased, although, from the setting off of portions of its territory, the census reports for some periods show an apparent decrease. (599-8)