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By: [Rabbi Gershon Tannenbaum](#)  
Wednesday, August 22, 2007

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## Skver Today And The History Of Spring Glen, N.Y.

*(Note: The following article was written by Dorothy Shapiro for the Catskills Institute website. Some very slight modifications have been made for this column. We thank Mrs. Shapiro for her research and her suggestions about what to include in a follow-up column.)*

Spring Glen is nestled in the Rondout Valley along U.S. Route 209 running parallel to the Shawangunk Mountains that are part of the Allegheny Mountain Range. Route 209 was formerly called the Queen's Highway and followed the route of the Old Mine Road from Kingston to Port Jervis. Originally an Indian Trail, it is claimed to be the oldest road for wheeled vehicles in the United States.

Spring Glen was originally named Homowack, an Indian name. It had been Homowack for 39 years until 1891 when the name was dropped. Some residents thought it crucial to change the name in order to attract more tourists. Spring Glen, its present name, reflects the many springs in the hills on both its sides.

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The hamlet of Spring Glen once boasted more than 60 bungalow colonies. There are historic spots, most of which are now on private property. On Lewis Road there is still a wall of stones built by the local Lenapee Indian. It lies on the road to the Spring Glen campgrounds, another spot that still exists for campers.

The road was formerly known as the Marcus Road. There is a synagogue in the hamlet, the Spring Glen Hebrew Congregation. It is still operational, and was recently placed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The hamlet also was the location of the Homowack Hotel, currently named Spring Mountain Resort. The hotel and 50% of the village is part of Sullivan County. Spring Glen is filled with a rich and important history, holding many cherished memories for its present and former residents.

### Spring Glen's Jewish History

The Spring Glen Synagogue is located in the town of Spring Glen, in the Township of Wawarsing, in the County of Ulster, in the State of New York. It is situated on the county line between Ulster and Sullivan

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- Yes
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Counties and is approximately four miles south of the Village of Ellenville.

Around 1900, the first Jewish family came to the area. Sam Myerson purchased land near what was the Homowack Lodge in the Sullivan County part of Spring Glen. Years later, the Myersons purchased additional land in the Ulster County part of Spring Glen and built a hotel. Other early arrivals in the area were: Joseph Krieger, Meyer Lefkowitz, and Louis Manpel. Later, more Jewish names appeared: Rosenblum, Spitzer, Lapidus, etc.

As more Jewish families arrived, services were held in the homes of the Nissenbaum and Lefkowitz families. In 1908 the congregation was formed, the synagogue built between 1916-1918 on land donated by the Manpel and Lefkowitz families, and incorporated in 1920. Congregation members have preserved both the exterior and interior of the building, displaying a deep sense of pride in their house of worship.

According to the late Katherine Terwilliger, Wawarsing Town Historian, the synagogue became a reality in July 1916 when a "Sacred Service" was held upon dedication of the Torah Scrolls. First, there was a grand parade to the property of Manpel and Lefkowitz where the dedication ceremony was to take place.

Just as it was starting, two Christians arrived, Wells C. Smith, Stationmaster, and John Thornton, Postmaster. They had raised money to buy the Jews a Bible. Mr. Smith presented it and made a warm speech in which he expressed the hope that a synagogue would be built soon that would honor the entire community. The synagogue was built in two years.

Services were held for the first time that summer. The official incorporation papers are dated 1920. It was to become the community home for the Jewish population and residents rushed to become members of the congregation. The women formed a Sisterhood and participated in the maintenance of the synagogue by conducting food sales throughout the year.

In its heyday, during the summer months, when approximately 2,000 summer guests would swell the population of Spring Glen, the synagogue was available on a daily basis for morning and evening prayers. Throughout the rest of the year, residents used the synagogue for Shabbos and *Yom Tov* observances, as well as celebrations – weddings, Bar Mitzvahs, and other special occasions.

With the waves of immigration from Eastern Europe, more and more Jews purchased land in Spring Glen and the resort industry began to flourish. Some were from landsman organizations – individuals who came from the same city or town in Europe and belonged to benevolent society organizations.

Many of these people operated summer bungalow colonies, rooming houses, or small hotels and entire families participated in running the resort – there was rarely money available to hire help. Most families returned to New York City after the two-month summer season, which officially ended on Labor Day. Few resort owners lived in Spring Glen year-round. For those who did remain, it was necessary to find employment

in the area whenever and wherever possible.

During the winter months, many of the owners of the resorts had other jobs and professions. For example, Irving Slavin was a skilled jeweler, Sam Baumwoll a plumber, Anna Lapidus an actress on the Yiddish stage, and many others were involved in the garment industry. Usually they worked at their professions in New York City and brought their earnings back to Spring Glen, to be invested in their resort businesses.

Money was scarce. Most of the people were immigrants who had come to America with nothing more than the dream of creating a new life in a new land where they would be free from the persecutions of Eastern European regimes. Bank mortgages were difficult to get. Often, money was borrowed from family members or neighbors to finance the growing resort industry. Routinely, money was borrowed at the end of the summer to get through the winter and then paid back at the beginning of the next summer season when guests arrived and paid for their bungalows or rooms.

Along with the resort industry, several farms produced eggs and chickens for the poultry industry. Some farmers had cows and delivered fresh milk to their neighbors every morning.

### **The D&H, The O&W, And Wurtsboro**

This history of Spring Glen includes the canal that came through the hamlet during the 1800s. The Delaware & Hudson (D&H) Canal was completed in 1828, built to transport coal from the mines of Pennsylvania and other goods from Honesdale, Penn. to Kingston, N.Y. Here it was loaded on barges that floated down the Hudson River to ports in New York City. Enormous amounts of coal were needed to fuel the furnaces of the tenements and factories in New York City at that time.

The canal was 108 miles long and consisted of 108 "locks." The lock was a device that was used to raise and lower the boats to different water levels since the Pennsylvania end of the canal was almost 1000 feet higher than the Hudson River end. Remains of the locks can still be seen in Spring Glen to this very day. The canal was the creation of two brothers, William and Maurice Wurts, for whom the Village of Wurtsboro is named, located 10 miles south of Spring Glen.

After many years of service, the canal became too expensive to operate and the new Ontario & Western Railroad, also known as the O&W, provided a cheaper and faster means of transporting goods. The water was eventually drained from the canal in the early 1900s. Spring Glen benefited from the Ontario & Western Railroad that came through on a regular basis. People used the railroad to get from community to community and particularly to and from New York City.

In the summer months it brought the visitors to the area, and was a necessary means of transportation, since few people owned cars in those days. For many years, Spring Glen residents had two favorite gathering places, the railroad station and the post office. People enjoyed meeting the seven o'clock evening train and then adjourning to the comfort of the post office benches.

### **The Register Of Historic Sites In New York State And The National Register Of Historic Places**

To be listed as a Historic Landmark is a time-consuming process. A great deal of paperwork must be completed. Documentation must be provided to support facts. Research is tedious and documents are usually hard to find. New and old photographs of the interior and exterior of the building are required for the application as well. Then the building must be nominated and more applications filed. Once that is done, several agencies review it and, if qualified, Landmark Status is attained.

Kathleen LaFrank, of the New York Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau, Peebles Island, Waterford, N.Y., was extremely helpful in accomplishing the registration. The Spring Glen Synagogue met the criteria to be named as a Historic Landmark and Ms. LaFrank guided Dorothy Shapiro every step of the way in order to place the Spring Glen Synagogue on State and National Registers.

The lists of State and National Registers contain the nation's official properties worthy of preservation, recognize the importance of their continued existence for the history of our country, and provide them with a measure of protection.

On August 8, 1999, nine synagogues in the Catskill Region were named to the New York State and National Registers of Historic Sites. Opening ceremonies were held at the Liberty Museum and Arts Center in Liberty, New York. There was an accompanying exhibit of the interiors and exteriors of the nine synagogues provided by local photographer Laverne Black.

"This event is clearly very important for this part of the state," commented J. Winthrop Aldrich, New York State Historic Preservation Deputy Commissioner, who presented the official citations to the representatives of the respective synagogues at the ceremony. "Jewish people founded and developed this area. These buildings have survived and are still in use. They should be enjoyed by all and I encourage everyone to accept them as important parts of Sullivan County's heritage."

### **Skver And Spring Glen**

In continuation of Spring Glen's history, the Skverer community in Spring Valley purchased the Homowack Hotel and surrounding property in Spring Glen, N.Y., in December of 2006, with the intention of establishing a *Chassidische* community there year-round. The hotel, now named Spring Mountain Resort, continues to operate and serves as a glatt kosher *Shomer Shabbos* retreat.

Substantial adjacent properties were subsequently acquired and are being used as Skver's summer camps for girls. Four-hundred-and-fifty acres in Spring Glen are now on Skver's drawing board of development.

On Sunday, August 19, thousands of *Chassidim* celebrated in Spring Glen, with the Skverer community, led by Rabbi Dovid Twersky, Skverer Rebbe, to mark the official inauguration of its new year-round

satellite community. Fleets of buses brought *Chassidim* from all parts of the Catskills as well as from Boro Park, Lakewood, Monsey, Montreal, New Square, and Williamsburg. New York State Troopers guided the heavy traffic, and local business lots were used for the multitude of necessary parking spaces.

Keynote speakers included the Skverer Rebbe; Rabbi Yisroel Avrohom Portugal, Skulener Rebbe; Rabbi Aryeh Malkiel Kotler, Rosh Yeshiva Beth Medrash Govoha Lakewood; and Rabbi Yitzchok Menachem Weinberg, Tolna Rebbe of Jerusalem. In addition, *Sefer Hadrochos Yeshoros*, speeches of the Skverer Rebbe, was published for the event and distributed.

Skver's present community in Spring Valley, the first year-round American *Chassidische* community established outside of a large city setting, had its start in 1957. Approximately 20 Skverer families moved from Williamsburg to a 120-acre former farm in North Spring Valley, under the leadership of Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Twersky, ז"ל (1899-1968), late Skverer Rebbe, who arrived in the United States in 1950.

The purchase price for the original 120 acres was \$120,000. Later, an additional 97 acres were acquired, a total of 217 acres. Before the end of the calendar year of 1957, almost 40 families had taken up residence in *Shikun Skver* – New Square. Sixty homes were built in that first phase of development.

In 1961, New Square became the first village in New York State to be governed by a religious group. Currently, more than 1,250 families call New Square their home. Today, New Square's 217 acres are completely developed. Almost no vacant building lots are available.

In addition, properties bordering New Square, as well as neighboring areas, are all fully developed, leaving no room for expansion. New Square is the second-fastest growing community in all of New York State. With Skver's natural population increase, the *kehillah's* administrators had to provide for the growing community.

Various search committees were established that visited and seriously evaluated a number of possible locations, both near and far. The short list of potential new possibilities included the Homowack Hotel. Located in Spring Glen, less than 65 miles from New Square, it had a number of advantages.

The Homowack Hotel itself is a huge edifice and complex, with hundreds of rooms of all sizes, ideal for a summer camp. Its large meeting rooms could serve community functions. Its 540 acres are four times the area of the original 97-acre launch in New Square. It is also less than five miles away from Ellenville, which has an established observant Jewish community with a 100-year-old Orthodox Jewish congregation.

The new community launch in Spring Glen hopefully will replicate the 1957 success. The Skverer Rebbe called the extension of what his father began 50 years ago, "...a continuation of the original community."



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