

HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF NISKAYUNA

Excerpted from "Niskayuna Excellence...Since 1809"

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The Town of Niskayuna derives its name from an Algonkian-Mohawk Indian word "Canastagione," which was used to describe an area on the north side of the Mohawk River between Vischer's Ferry and the Cohoes Falls, and was said to refer to "corn fields" or "corn flats." Although somewhat obscure, this name appears in more than sixty forms in Colonial documents. Like the settlers, the name passed to the south side of the river and came to refer to the area now called Niskayuna.



View of the Mohawk River from the Bike Path in Niskayuna

The northern boundary of the town is the Mohawk River as it was established in post-glacial times. As the Iro-Mohawk flowed northward through the Alpaats-Ballston Lake-Round Lake channel to the Hudson River, a spillway came into being from Schenectady to Vischers Ferry. This spillway cut through overlying shales, resulting in the aqueduct gorge. The western edge of the town borders the former wash-plain of the pre-glacial Mohawk. The Lisha Kill is the only tributary to the Mohawk River within the town.

In prehistoric times, the area that now comprises the Town of Niskayuna was a network of paths and trails leading to main arteries of travel and to hunting and fishing camps. The main way was a north-south path crossing the Normans Kill to the Lisha Kill northward and leading to the ford of the Mohawk River at Vischer's Ferry where there were villages on both banks of the river.

The earliest sites are of the Laurentian culture and date back to some 2000 years BC. At some later time, a migration of the so-called "Coastal Culture" passed through the town and left a series of small camps just below the high terraces bordering the south bank of the Mohawk. During the historic period, both Mohican and Iroquois tribal Indians roamed about the town, superimposing their campsites over those of earlier generations.

The Town of Niskayuna antedates the settlement of Schenectady approximately 20 years. There is one record of French traders dealing with local parties of Indians as early as 1640. The first known land transaction is that of Harme Vedder in 1664, but there is only one document as proof—and the patent itself has thus far not been found.

It is recorded that in 1667 one Maritie Damen bought land at Niskayuna. In 1669 the Mohawk Tribe gave five small islands in the river at Niskayuna to Hillitje Van Olinda (nee Van Slyck) as payment for her services as their interpreter. Harme Vedder and Barent Reyndertson Smit seem to have obtained a patent in 1671 from Governor Francis Lovelace for land running from the Schuyllune (Shaker Creek) on the east to the Lisha Kill on the west, or about two miles of flatlands. As time passed, the major portion of this land became that of the Clute, Creiger

and Tymenson families, and later tracts were granted which included the Switz, Schuyler, Clute, Van Nes, and Bratt & Glan Patents.

During the early Indian wars there was a fort at the Cregier (later Freligh) Farm, and a company of soldiers was stationed there many years.

It was not until well in the 19th Century that progress came to the town. The Troy and Schenectady Turnpike was opened in 1811; in 1825 the Erie Canal was opened to the Hudson River, thereby providing Niskayuna a new outlet for its rural products; in 1832 an Albany-Schenectady Railroad was opened and 11 years later a similar rail line was extended to Schenectady from Troy, paralleling the Erie Canal. Balltown Road was opened about 1800 to Alexander's Mills (now Aqueduct); in 1805 Alexander Stevens built a dam across the Mohawk to furnish power for grist and saw mills, and he also built a bridge across the Mohawk.



Niskayuna Train Station

The Town of Niskayuna was created as a political entity on March 7, 1809, which is same date that the County of Schenectady was constituted. Growth of the town was slow, until the production of the American Locomotive and the General Electric companies caused Schenectady and its environs to blossom rapidly.



GE Global Research Facility in Niskayuna
Photo Courtesy GE Global Research

Today Niskayuna is a modern community closely identified with technology and national defense corporations, and public schools nationally recognized for excellence. The Town is home to General Electric's Global Research Center, Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory, SI Group, Environment One and T.V. Station WRGB.

Notable residents of Niskayuna

[Ivar Giaever](#) -- Winner of the [Nobel Prize](#) in Physics in 1972 with [Leo Esaki](#) and [Brian David Josephson](#) for work in solid-state physics. Giaever, originally from Norway, has made Niskayuna his home while regularly giving guest lectures in the Capital District community.

[Ron Rivest](#) -co-inventor of the RSA encryption algorithm, MIT Professor

[Jeff Blatnick](#) -- winner of the gold medal in wrestling at the [1984 Summer Olympics](#)

[André Davis](#) -- Wide Receiver for the Houston Texans of the National Football League.